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THE CLUB AT CROW'S CORNER

JAMES OTIS

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"HAVE YOU HAD YOUR DINNER?"

The Club at Crow's Corner

By

JAMES OTIS

Illustrated by ISABEL W. CALEY

THE PENN PUBLISHING
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1915

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The Club at Crow's Corner

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The Club at Crow's Corner

CHAPTER I

MR. CROW AND MR. TURTLE

Over in that portion of the big woods where the brook swings around a clump of alders in order to wind in and out among the trees is a very large and very old oak tree whose branches afford a roosting place for all the feathered inhabitants of that vicinity, and give shade on warm days to all who are forced to wear fur coats during the summer.

This oak tree stands near what might be called a "corner" of the brook, and because old Mr. James Crow is to be found among its branches every moment of the day or night except when out in search of food, the oak tree, the bend of the brook, and the land in that immediate neighborhood have come to be known as "Crow's Corner," so Mr. Bunny Rabbit declares, and there is no reason to doubt his word.

Mr. Bunny is a very old fellow. He never had any tail to speak of, and in his younger days 'Squire Owl, whose wife and little ones were in need of rabbit stew, decided to take Mr. Bunny home with him; but the old fellow, who was very spry during the earlier portion of his life, jumped into a thicket of thorn bushes so nimbly that the 'Squire only succeeded in nipping about half an inch off poor Bunny's apology for a tail. One of the old fellow's ears has been split into two pieces by an over-eager hawk, and he has a great scar on his left side where Mr. Reynard Fox snapped at him, but failed to get more than a small mouthful after all.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Bunny has so many scars which tell of hairbreadth escapes, and has been forced to run so many times for very life, that no mistake can be made in setting him down as an old fellow of vast experience, who could tell many an entertaining story of his own adventures; and because he is ready and willing to talk at almost any time to a friendly listener, I came to know about the Fur and Feather Club, whose meeting place is at Crow's Corner.

Mr. Bunny is free to admit that Mr. James Crow is older than himself and has seen very

much more of the world than ever did any single member of the Rabbit family, because of the ease with which he can travel; but at the same time he declares, with many a sigh and groan because of the wickedness of this world, that Mr. Crow often tells stories in which is no truth whatever, and this he does in order to make it appear that he is a bird of considerable importance in any neighborhood where he may chance to be.

How the club at Crow's Corner was started Mr. Bunny cannot say. He himself came upon it by mistake, while he was scurrying here and there under every friendly bush and leaf in order to refuse an invitation to dinner which 'Squire Owl was very eager he should accept, and when he arrived at that particular place in the big woods Mr. Crow was telling Cheeko Squirrel and two or three members of his family about the wickedness of Mr. Weasel, who had just killed all Mrs. Thrush's children.

'Squire Owl put an end to the meeting at that time, for Master Cheeko and his little ones believed it necessary they should get under cover in the shortest possible space of time; but when Mr. Bunny had more leisure he went back

to Crow's Corner and was speedily made a member of the club.

"We don't have any regular hours for meeting," Mr. Bunny said while first telling about the association. "When 'Squire Owl or Professor Hawk have had such a big dinner that they forget to be hungry, we get together around the tree, those of us who belong to the fur section, with the associates of the feather department on the branches, and then it is that you might hear some rare stories if you happened along that way."

At that moment Mr. Bunny suddenly dropped his ears over his eyes and began to laugh heartily, whereupon, as a matter of course, it seemed proper to ask what had caused his mirth.

"I just happened to think of a rare trick Cheeko Squirrel played on Mr. Crow not long ago, and there was a good deal of talk about expelling him from the club; but everybody except Mr. Crow himself thought it was so funny that they didn't have the heart to turn Cheeko out, for he means well, as a general thing, even though he does spend the most of his time scolding somebody or something.

"You see Cheeko had the idea that it was his duty to get square with Mr. Crow because the old fellow gave him a downright talking to before all the members of the club on account of his chattering so much while the speeches were being made. It really wasn't to be wondered at that Mr. Crow called him to order, for you know what a disturbance he makes over nothing; but Cheeko thought he was abused, and didn't get more than half the sleep he needed, on account of lying awake nights to figure out how he could get the best of poor old Jimmy Crow.

"Well, one day while he was down near the pond where the Geese family spend so much of their time dabbling around in the water in the most foolish way you can imagine, Cheeko hit upon what he thought was a great plan; but it turned out to be a very serious matter, or might have been if 'Squire Owl hadn't interfered.

"Down at the pond lives an old fellow by the name of Slowly Turtle, and between you and me, I don't think he has very much sense, although you can't really say he is foolish. I suppose it takes him so long to go from one place to another that he gets himself all mixed

up with watching out to see if he is moving. He isn't the kind of fellow you'd really want for a friend; but because he doesn't do any great harm in the world, we members of the club pass the time of day with him when we meet.

"Well, at this time I'm going to tell you about, Cheeko Squirrel happened to go down to the pond just out of curiosity, and there he saw old Slowly, lying on a rock sunning himself.

"'Howdy, Mr. Turtle,' Cheeko said friendly-like, and the old fellow, being too lazy to speak, winked one eye at Mr. Squirrel.

"'Have you had your dinner yet?' Cheeko asked, as if it would make him feel dreadfully bad to know that Mr. Turtle was hungry.

"'I haven't had time to go after it, and it's so near sunset now that I'm afraid I'll have to wait till to-morrow.'

"'Why don't you catch a big, fat frog?' Cheeko asked as if he couldn't rest easy until he knew that Mr. Turtle was comfortable.

"'I haven't seen any around here lately, and there isn't time to go hunting to-day.'

"'I don't suppose you'd be willing to follow any plan of mine,' Mr. Squirrel said, speaking

soft as silk ; ' but if you did, I'm almost certain I could put you in a place where all you'd have to do would be to open your mouth when you wanted a bite.'

" That pleased Mr. Turtle 'way down to the ground, and he agreed he'd do whatever Mr. Squirrel said, providing he didn't have to walk too far, so Cheeko set about the plan he'd figured out in his mind for getting square with Mr. Crow. In the first place he daubed Mr. Turtle all over with clay till he looked like a ball of mud, and while doing this he told the old fellow how to act.

" ' I'm going to carry you over into the woods a little way and you are to keep as still as a mouse till you feel some one meddling with the mud I'm sticking to your shell. Then you'll know it's time to get your dinner, and all you'll have to do will be to shut your jaws on whatever is within reach. I'll promise that you shall have meat that will be sweeter than the fattest frog you ever heard croak.'

" Mr. Turtle let Cheeko do what he pleased, and if you'll believe it, that squirrel rolled the old fellow in his covering of clay all the way from the pond up to Crow's Corner. It must

have been a terrible job, but Cheeko was willing to do it for the sake of getting a joke on Mr. Crow, and when he came to the foot of the tree he sat down in front of what appeared to be nothing more than a clay ball, with his tail spread out over his head as if he were thinking mighty serious. It wasn't long before old Mr. Crow espied him and it really did seem as if that bird would shake himself into little pieces, he was so curious to know what Cheeko was doing. He sat on the very tip of one of the branches, looking at the odd thing until he could keep still no longer, and then he hopped down by the side of Cheeko.

"'What have you got with you, Mr. Squirrel?' he asked, trying to turn the clay ball over, and Cheeko said careless-like, as if it didn't make very much difference to him whether Mr. Crow got the information he wanted:

"'Roll it over two or three times and you may know as much as I do about it.'

"Mr. Crow twisted his head first on one side and then on the other until he had looked at the clay ball with both eyes, but Mr. Squirrel didn't offer to explain anything more, and

finally he grew so excited that it seemed as if he just really had to do as Cheeko wanted. He rolled the funny looking thing to and fro without learning anything regarding it, and then began pecking at the hole in one end which Mr. Squirrel had left open so Mr. Turtle could get air.

"By this time poor old Mr. Turtle made up his slow mind that the meat Cheeko told him about was near at hand, and before Mr. Crow could wink an eye, out came a queer-looking head with jaws that fastened on the bird's leg in a way that wasn't pleasant or comfortable.

"There's no need of my saying that Mr. Crow was frightened. The idea of being bitten by a lump of clay nearly scared him white, and up into the tree he flew caw-cawing at the full strength of his lungs, while Mr. Turtle hung on the best he knew how, for it must have startled him a good bit to feel that instead of getting a dinner he was going up into the air like a balloon. Of course, old Slowly couldn't make any noise; but Mr. Crow was doing that for both of them, and down at the foot of the tree Cheeko sat laughing until, so Mr. Porcupine declares, it seemed certain he would burst.

"Just then 'Squire Owl, who had been awakened by the disturbance, came out to learn what the matter was, but Mr. Crow was so frightened that he couldn't give him the least little bit of information, and the 'Squire had to find out for himself. Being near-sighted in the daytime, it was quite a while before he saw Mr. Turtle's head, and then he cried out angrily:

"'What are you doing up a tree, you rascal? Let go of Mr. Crow's leg, and go back to your pond this instant.'

"'If I do that I shall break myself all to pieces,' Mr. Turtle said, speaking rather indistinctly because his mouth was so full; and, hearing the words, Mr. Squirrel laughed harder than ever, until the 'Squire began to get an idea of how it all happened.

"'This is some of your doings, Cheeko Squirrel,' he said, savagely. 'Call off your turtle, or I'll come down there and eat you without butter.'

"'You've tried to do that a good many times, and I've always got the best of you, even when it wasn't very light, so don't puff yourself up with the idea that I'm afraid of a big bunch of

feathers like you while the sun is shining,' Cheeko said, shaking his tail till Mr. Porcupine says he was afraid it would drop off.

"Of course the 'Squire was dreadfully angry because of Cheeko's impudence, and down he came out of the tree without stopping to think how blind he was, while Mr. Crow shouted:

"'Never mind that miserable squirrel, 'Squire; but take this terrible thing off my leg,' and Mr. Turtle mumbled as well as he could without opening his jaws:

"'I'm the one who should be helped, for I can't afford to fall out of a tree at my time of life.'

"All the while 'Squire Owl blundered around, not able to see even his own nose, and Cheeko Squirrel jumped around him laughing and shouting till every bird in the woods flew over to the Corner to find out what was happening."

CHAPTER II

CHEEKO IN DANGER

Mr. Bunny had paused in the midst of his story to laugh at the comical situation as described by himself, with Mr. Turtle clinging for dear life to Mr. Crow's leg, and the old bird screaming at the full strength of his lungs for help, while 'Squire Owl darted here and there blindly, growing more and more angry as Cheeko Squirrel continued to say disagreeable things.

"You see what made it altogether too funny was the way the 'Squire raved because he couldn't find Cheeko," Bunny continued as he wiped away with his ears the tears which had been caused by mirth. "If Cheeko only had a bit more sense, he wouldn't have carried on quite so bad, for he must have realized that the 'Squire would lay it up against him; but all he thought of at the time was the fun, and the way he talked to that old bird was something dreadful.

"Now you must remember that Mr. Crow didn't hold his tongue all this time, but kept on shouting for help until you would have thought he was afraid of his life, and we couldn't hear very much of what Mr. Turtle was trying to say. Cheeko didn't have time to pay attention to any one except 'Squire Owl, and danced from one branch to another screaming and chattering until, suddenly, down darted Professor Hawk with his mouth wide open.

"Oh me, oh my, how that squirrel did hustle! If the Professor had once got a grip on him, it was good-bye Cheeko, and nobody knew that better than Master Cheeko himself. He gave one leap for a lot of thorn bushes which grew near the old oak tree as if somebody had put them there for the especial benefit of us members of the fur section, and it seemed to me as if he alighted a good fifty feet from where he started. He must have torn his coat in more than one place, for when a fellow jumps like that he can't pick out just the right spot for stopping, as I know to my sorrow when I've been trying to give Mr. Fox the slip.

"Of course, Professor Hawk didn't stand any chance of getting at him once he was among

the thorns, and he would have sailed off in a huff, but that the 'Squire shouted for him to stop. Then he came back to the angry old owl, and the two whispered together a long time without paying the least little bit of attention to poor Jimmy Crow. I knew the big fellows were hatching up some kind of plan to get the best of Cheeko, and at the first good chance I told him the wisest course for him was to get as far from Crow's Corner as his legs would carry him between then and sunset.

"It isn't of very much use to give Cheeko advice, for he always thinks he knows better than any one else, and this time, instead of thanking me for taking the trouble to find him among all those thorns, he said as pertly as any sparrow you ever heard :

"'I want you to understand, Bunny Rabbit, that I'm not afraid of those two old fogies—no, nor of all their families. I've taken care of myself in these woods a good many years, and I'm not to be scared by an old owl now.'

"'It's better to be scared than eaten, Cheeko,' I said as I rubbed two or three spots of blood from his coat, for it was in a shocking condition by this time. 'You can't stay here among the

thorns very long, because Mr. Weasel is sure to hear all this row, and once he gets on your trail you're a gone squirrel.'

"'He tried to run me down last fall; but I gave him the slip all right,' Cheeko said quickly, puffing his chest way out because he was mighty proud of escaping from the bloodthirsty Mr. Weasel.

"'It isn't likely that a squirrel could get away more than once after Mr. Weasel had started for him,' I said, just a bit provoked because Cheeko Squirrel thought himself so smart, and then I left him all swelled up with pride, getting out from the bushes as Mr. Blue Jay came along screaming with anger on account of the hubbub in the club quarters where everything is usually conducted in the most seemly manner.

"Mr. Jay is a wise bird, and you can make a note of that. Just as soon as he saw that clay ball hanging to Mr. Crow's leg and understood what was beneath all the mud, he knew exactly how to fix things; but it was quite a while before he could make Mr. Crow and Mr. Turtle hear him, which is saying a good deal when you come to understand what a loud voice

he has. After a while, however, he succeeded in making old Jimmy hold his peace and then he said, as if he were the president of the club instead of only a small-sized member :

"'You can't expect Mr. Turtle to tumble out of the tree just to please you, James Crow, for he would break himself to pieces and besides, if what Cock Robin tells me is true, he didn't come up here of his own free will.'

"'I'm not saying he did,' Mr. Crow snapped out short as pie crust. 'He took hold of my leg and I couldn't get here without him, and that's why the miserable creature is making so much trouble.'

"'I'm not doing a thing,' Mr. Turtle said, speaking as if the tears were just ready to run down his muddy cheeks. 'I'm too old to be tumbling around like a jumping-jack and if anybody is making trouble it's this wretched crow, who has put on more airs than a peacock since the club was started.'

"'How did he get hold of Crow's leg in the first place?' Mr. Jay asked as if he were a regular judge, and had a right to pry into other people's business.

"Then poor old Slowly told the whole story,

while Cheeko snickered and screamed from his hiding place among the thorns, and, after Mr. Jay had studied the whole thing over, he said, bristling up the feathers on his head, 'There's only one fair thing for you to do, James Crow: Take old Slowly back to the shore of the pond and then he'll let go of your leg.'

"'But how will I get all this mud off my shell?' Mr. Turtle asked, speaking quite distinctly for a fellow who had his mouth full of crow's leg.

"'Soak yourself till it comes off,' Mr. Jay said with a laugh, and the president of the club asked, as if he were in a good deal of pain:

"'Will you open your mouth if I carry you back to the pond? It's going to be a dreadful job to fly such a distance with you hanging there; but I'm willing to make the try if you'll agree that what Mr. Jay has said will be the square thing.'

"Of course Mr. Turtle promised, for what else could he do while he was up a tree so far, and all the members of the club who had come to learn what was going on got out of the way to give Mr. Crow a fair chance. It was a good deal like work to fly while his leg was being pulled so

badly ; but he contrived to do it and, after watching until he settled down at the edge of the pond, I began to look around for Cheeko Squirrel.

" 'Squire Owl and Professor Hawk had gone away, telling Mr. Porcupine they were off for a picnic; but that didn't seem reasonable to me, for the pair were not such very warm friends as all that, and I knew there was trouble in store for Cheeko if he didn't watch out a good deal sharper than I ever knew of his doing.

" I just wish you could have seen that squirrel when I found him sitting at the front door of Sonny Hedgehog's hole, ready to get under cover at the first sign of danger ! Do you know, he really believed he had tired out the 'Squire and that there wasn't any danger he could come to harm !

" ' You won't find me in a pickle, no matter how long you hunt,' he said, shaking his tail till it really made me seasick. ' I'd like to see the owl, or the hawk, for that matter, that I couldn't fool when I laid myself right out to do the job. They've run things their own way so long around here that they think everybody else must get off the earth when they say the word. I'll show 'em what an up-to-date squirrel can do.'

"'You'll be showing nothing mighty soon, Cheeko, if you don't take a tumble to yourself,' I said, and I couldn't help speaking a bit short, for it provoked me terribly to see him throwing out his chest as if he were second cousin to Senator Bear. 'You're letting the 'Squire and Professor Hawk shut your eye, that's what's the matter! I'm telling you that those two have had their heads together to your harm, and you'll soon know what they were talking about if you keep the idea in your head that you're the biggest little animal in the woods. Take my advice and get away from Crow's Corner for a while. There are some nice ears of corn over on Mr. Man's place now and it would be a pleasant little vacation to go there for a few days until this matter simmers down a bit.'

"'Do you suppose I'm going to let those old birds think I'm afraid of them?' Cheeko asked, bold as brass, and it was no use for me to try to keep my temper within bounds any longer.

"'Of course you're afraid of them!' I cried. 'It only proves that you've fallen in love with yourself, when you talk like that, and I'm not going to waste any more time on you.'

"'Nobody asked you for your time, you long-

eared, bob-tailed old fraud!' Cheeko said, swinging his tail in the most impudent manner imaginable, and I hopped off, determined that I'd never raise a paw in his behalf, no matter how much trouble he might be in; but, of course, when it seemed certain he'd be made over into a pie, as I'm going to tell you about, I quite forgot that he had insulted me when I was trying to do him a favor.

"I left him at the door of Sonny Hedgehog's home and went down toward the pond to see what luck poor old Slowly had in scraping the mud off his shell; but before reaching there whom should I come across but the 'Squire and the Professor hunting for nuts. Now you know as well as I do that there isn't a member of either the Owl or the Hawk family who has a hankering for nuts. Of course there was some mischief in the wind and I had a pretty good idea that Cheeko was the particular nut they were looking for, so I hid behind a lot of ferns till I'd got at the root of their scheme.

"It was too early in the season to find nuts on the ground; but they didn't come to realize that until after searching around among the leaves a long while and then the Professor flew

into the top of the walnut tree, where he nipped off two or three. Then he came down to where the 'Squire was waiting for him and said with a chuckle:

"'Just as soon as that fool crow gets back, all the members of the club will gather near the oak tree to hear what he has to say about the mix-up with Slowly Turtle. Of course Cheeko will be there too, for there is nothing going on around these woods that he doesn't try to have a paw in. We'll put the nuts where he'll see them, and you shall get in the shade where the sun won't hurt your eyes. Then, if he isn't your meat, I'll agree to furnish the dinners to-morrow.'

"The idea of two big bullies taking so much time to get the best of one little squirrel! I forgot all about Cheeko's impudence to me and, instead of looking after old Mr. Turtle, I scuttled back through the bushes to watch the villains while they laid their trap."

CHAPTER III

BUNNY RABBIT'S EFFORTS

Mr. Bunny Rabbit hopped up on a fallen tree where he could the better be seen while telling his story, and where, also, he might have eyes and ears on the alert for danger. A cautious old fellow is Bunny, else he would not be alive this day, for among the wood folk there is more than one who has a fondness for rabbit pie or stew, and that member of the Rabbit family who lives to have children of his own has given good proof that he keeps his wits about him the greater portion of the time.

"I was telling you about Cheeko's foolishness, and how nearly it cost him his life," Mr. Bunny said after a pause so long that it really seemed, for the time, as if he had forgotten the story.

"Of course, old Mr. Crow flew back to the oak tree as soon as Slowly Turtle had let go of his leg, and, oh me! oh my! how he did scold about Mr. Turtle, never once seeming to think

that Cheeko Squirrel had anything to do with the matter. Nearly every member of the club pretended to believe that Slowly was the only one who should be blamed, although they knew that Cheeko is a master hand at making mischief; but it so happened that he wasn't there to make trouble, and the result was that the president of the club had everything his own way.

"It was voted that Mr. Turtle should never be made welcome at Crow's Corner; that he had behaved in an unseemly manner, and ought to be shunned by every member of the club. This matter had no more than been settled when we heard Master Squirrel screaming and chattering as if he were the only real thing in the woods, and as his voice sounded nearer and nearer, telling that he was coming to join the company, I looked around to see what had become of the Professor and the 'Squire.

"If you'll believe it, they were nowhere to be seen, and I'm such a silly thing, sometimes, that I really believed they had given up the scheme I saw them working on. Then I got interested in what Mr. Crow was saying, for he started in the best he knew how to have all the

members of the club vote that Slowly Turtle and his entire family should be turned out of the pond, and never allowed to come near it again.

"Cocky Robin wanted to know who'd do the 'turning out,' and how it was to be done, but the old man Crow was so angry he wouldn't go into that part of the business at all, and claimed that after the vote had been taken it would be time enough to settle what he called the 'minor points.'

"Just then up came Cheeko, his tail spread over his head and waving to and fro in that way which always makes me feel seasick. It doesn't seem possible, as I tell it to you now, but it is a fact that, not content with having been the means of giving Mr. Crow the sorest leg you ever saw on a bird, he must needs begin to brag about what he had done in the way of making trouble in the club.

"Then Mr. Jay, who had been roosting in the very top of the tree with his crest sticking straight up because of what he had done toward straightening out matters, lost his temper, and began giving Cheeko about as severe a lecture as ever any squirrel listened to, but all the

while the foolish mischief-maker chattered and screamed as if he were the whole show.

"I had forgotten entirely about the 'Squire and Professor Hawk, until I saw Cheeko running along the ground toward where three or four walnuts were lying near a clump of fir bushes, and then I got right up on my hind legs and shouted to him that he'd best keep under cover if he wanted to save his skin.

"'Take care of yourself, if you can, you bobtailed old fraud, and I'll show that a fellow about my size is able to do pretty much as he pleases in these woods.'

"Of course, every member of the club was looking at Cheeko by this time and I'll venture to say there was not one present who didn't think he was making a fool of himself by talking in such a strain, for there are precious few of us wood folk who can do as they please all the time.

"Well, Master Cheeko skipped toward the nuts, shaking his tail to show that he was a terribly brave fellow, and if 'Squire hadn't been quite so blind it would have been the last tail-shake for that squirrel. You must know that the 'Squire was hiding among the fir bushes in

front of which the nuts had been laid and somewhere among the small branches was the Professor watching out to take a hand in the plan in case the first part of it missed; but, of course, we didn't know all that at the time.

"Cheeko was so eager to show the members of the club that he had no reason to be afraid of anything wearing feathers or fur that he didn't look to the right or to the left, but made straight for the nuts, and, just as he was about to pick up one, out sailed the 'Squire with a rush and a bang, which showed how angry he was.

"Now the Professor had laid the nuts in the shade of the fir bushes, so they would be sheltered from the sunlight, but yet it was considerably lighter there than in the thicket; consequently the instant the 'Squire popped his head out he had to shut his eyes, of course, so by the time he struck the ground Cheeko had jumped aside.

"If the foolish squirrel had been satisfied with thus giving 'Squire Owl the slip, he might have boasted for many a day about going straight into the old fellow's trap and coming out again without a scratch; but he must needs scream and laugh as if it were something very

funny, and then Professor Hawk came into the game. Down he flew, aiming straight for Cheeko, and, with never a care as to how brightly the sun might shine, for there's nothing the matter with his eyes, and then was the time when I believed Master Cheeko was down and out for good. And so he would have been but for Mr. Crow, who, forgetting the trick Cheeko had played on him, dropped down from the top of the old oak more quickly than I ever saw a bird move before, fluttering his wings directly under the Professor's beak just as he was on the point of snapping up a fat squirrel, who would have delighted the stomachs of the little Hawks.

"Even though Mr. Crow moved so swiftly, it was the narrowest kind of squeak for Cheeko. The Professor's claws struck his back, cutting through his coat in three or four places, and he received such a blow that it was quite as much as he could do to scramble among the raspberry bushes, which, fortunately, grew near at hand. He didn't have his tail over his head then, and that's a fact; but he was about as discouraged an animal as you ever saw. How that old owl did rave and scold when he found that Cheeko

had got off alive! He accused every member of the club with having had a paw or a wing in his defeat, and threatened with many a needless word to pay us off even though he had to spend every minute of his time for the next month.

"The Professor didn't say anything; but flew up on Mr. Crow's perch, looking sour as vinegar, and I said to myself then that he was the one we had the most reason to fear. You could tell by the look in his eye that he was already thinking up some wicked plan, and I really had palpitation of the heart because of imagining what he might be able to do if he set himself right down to getting revenge.

"If you'll believe it, I didn't dare stay at the foot of the tree where I could see the evil glare in his eyes, even though I was snug among the thorn bushes; but hopped off through the underbrush, taking mighty good care not to show myself in the open for a single minute, until I found poor Cheeko, who looked as if all he needed in this world was a deep, deep hole where he could die in peace.

"'Have you found out that you can't do pretty much as you please, Cheeko?' I asked, and he answered with a groan:

"'I suppose you think it is funny to talk that way when a fellow is dying,' and he tried to swing his tail a bit, but couldn't move a single hair. I can't begin to tell how badly off he was.

"Of course I couldn't help pitying him, even though he had called me a bob-tailed fraud, and after doing my best to show him that the animal, or the bird, for that matter, who boasts of what he can do, and sticks his nose into danger simply to show that he isn't afraid, is the silliest thing alive, I promised to have Mrs. Bunny fix him up the same kind of herb tea she always makes for me when I've been handled roughly by some of the wood bullies.

"He declared he couldn't get into his own house, and that even though it was possible for him to move about as lively as before the Professor hit him, he wouldn't dare go up a tree for at least two weeks, all of which showed that he realized how foolish he had been. I hunted around until I found snug quarters under the roots of an old pine, and helped him move in; but I tell you the tears came to his eyes more than once before he settled down, for his back was so sore that the least movement caused him

pain. Then I started for home, little dreaming that by trying to help Cheeko I was at the same time laying a trap for my own little Sonny Bunny, which, as you shall see, I found out that I really was doing.

"Cheeko made me agree to come back as soon as possible, and, remembering that I had promised my wife some nice fresh lettuce from Mr. Man's garden that night for supper, I agreed with him that if I didn't get my chores done up early, I'd send Sonny Bunny with the herb tea.

"Now it seems that some of the neighbors had told my wife of all that happened at the club, and she was nearly frightened out of her wits because I had stayed away so long. When I told her of my promise to Cheeko, she said flatly that she wouldn't lift a paw to help an idle fellow who was always finding fault with everybody instead of getting in his winter's supply of nuts; but after hearing how badly off he was, she took it all back and set about making the herb tea.

"'If I don't get back by the time it is done, send Sonny Bunny over with some of it, and tell the little fellow to stay with Cheeko till I get there,' I said to my wife, for if anything

could cheer an invalid it would be the funny capers of an innocent little rabbit like my youngest. I only wish there was time for me to tell you of all his bright doings; you should see him dancing in the swamp when the moon shines brightly, and then if you didn't say he was the cutest baby who ever wore a fur coat, it would be because you are not a judge of children.

"Well, I started off for Mr. Man's garden, taking good care to keep out of sight even though it was too late for the Professor's family to be out, and too early for either the Weasels or the Owls, and never so much as dreaming I had almost sent poor little Sonny Bunny to his death.

"I knew exactly where to find the best lettuce, and got all I wanted without being seen by Mr. Man or that meddling son of his. Then, instead of going home in a hurry, I loitered here or there to get young carrots, or a few heads of clover, thinking I would make of the dinner a regular feast.

"It was a full hour after sunset when I went into the house with such a supply of good things as would have surprised Mrs. Rabbit if she

hadn't been so sorely worried about Sonny Bunny.

"'I sent him off with the herb tea very soon after you left, cautioning him to hop back before it was time for Mr. Weasel to come out, and he hasn't shown his ears here yet. You must go after him at once, Bunny, and don't let Cheeko persuade you to stay a single minute, for I am too nervous to be left alone.'"

At this point Mr. Rabbit's story was interrupted by the appearance of his wife, who, half hidden amid the ferns, beckoned him to her side.

"Stay where you are, and I'll be right back," he said in a whisper. "Don't move about too much, for she is very timid, especially since Mr. Man's boy Tommy set his dog to chase her."

Then he hopped away, and what could a body do but wait until he should be at liberty to finish the story?

CHAPTER IV

SONNY BUNNY'S PERIL

It was possible to see Mr. Bunny Rabbit talking earnestly with his wife amid the ferns for five minutes or more, and then he came back to the old log, curling his whiskers and otherwise appearing to be well satisfied with the world in general and himself in particular.

"My wife is such a nervous thing since Mr. Man's boy Tommy set his dog on her," he said, hopping up on the log that he might the better be seen. "Now she has got it in her head that Mr. Weasel has found his way to our home, and ran all this distance up here to warn me about being careful when I came to supper. She's old enough to know that I'm keeping my eye out for that murdering villain, and the first time I heard of his coming around where we live I'd move.

"I suppose it seems kind of queer to you that all us wood folk are so afraid of Mr. Weasel;

but if you were to see him out on one of his killings, you'd understand it very readily. It would seem just a little bit different if he picked us small people up for dinner or breakfast; but he does nothing of the kind. He commits murder just to please his wicked self, and oftentimes doesn't stop to suck a single drop of blood from his victim. A desperately wicked old fellow is Mr. Weasel, and even the 'Squire and the Professor are afraid of him.

"Yes, yes, I'm going to tell you how much trouble I got poor little Sonny Bunny into, through trying to help Cheeko Squirrel after he had so needlessly poked his nose into danger. I couldn't help saying just a word about that miserable weasel, because of all the fright my wife had on his account, and now for the story I began so long ago:

"You'll remember that my wife sent the poor little fellow to Cheeko with some herb tea, and when I got back with the things for dinner she was terribly worried because he hadn't come home. I'm willing to confess that I didn't feel really easy in mind myself, for he was too young to be out in the woods alone after dark, never having been taught to take care of himself in

the night, and off I scuttled the best I knew how, which wasn't slow; but trying to make myself believe that Sonny stayed to cheer Cheeko.

"I was hopping along mighty fast when whom should I see just ahead of me on the path but Mr. Fox, standing with his head cocked over on one side as he always holds it when he's up to some mischief. I was in a terrible hurry, but it seemed safer to stop a bit till I'd found out what he was up to, and lucky it was that I did.

"Old Mr. Fox had his mind so taken up with the business on hand that he didn't hear me when I crept under the ferns where I could see all that was going on. He stood looking down sideways, as if trying to make up his mind just what to do, and then, suddenly, he began to scratch the dirt at a terrible rate. Of course, I knew he wasn't building a new house at that time of night, and after twisting my neck till I got a cramp in it trying to see, it popped into my head that he was working at the very place where Mr. Weasel killed my poor brother the summer before. Then I got mighty nervous, for I knew that none of our family was using

the hole unless they'd gone in since I came from Cheeko's new flat.

"'You might as well come out and save me the trouble of digging for you, Sonny Bunny,' Mr. Fox said, as he stopped to catch his breath, and my hair stood right up on end, for I began to understand that my little Sonny Bunny, meeting Mr. Fox on the way home, had dodged in there to get out of his way.

"'It'll be the worse for you if you make me do all this work,' Mr. Fox said, breathing loud, for he didn't like to dig so hard for one small rabbit, and I just really held my breath, I was so afraid Sonny Bunny would think he could make matters any easier by trusting to that treacherous fox. But the little fellow had good sense and lay still as a mouse, so the miserable villain began digging again.

"Oh me, oh my, how hard I did try to think up some plan to help poor Sonny Bunny out of the scrape, for of course it wouldn't have been any use to make a fight with a fellow so much bigger than I was, and at last it seemed as if I'd struck just the plan.

"I snooped around through the bushes, holding my breath mighty hard, for Mr. Fox has a

good pair of ears, till I was among a lot of raspberry vines not so very far from the old oak. I crept 'way in among them, although I got some pretty bad scratches, and when I was so far in that there was no danger the 'Squire could get hold of me, I sung out the best I knew how:

"'Oh, please, Mr. Crow, send somebody to help me, for I'm near choked to death here among the raspberry bushes and am afraid Mr. Weasel will come along before I can get out!'

"Then Mr. Fox stopped digging and pricked up his ears, making his voice sound mighty soft as he asked, as if he were my best friend:

"'Who is in trouble?'

"'It's Bunny Rabbit!' I cried, making believe I thought it was Mr. Crow who spoke. 'Please send somebody here right quick, dear Mr. Crow!'

"'I'm coming right away,' Mr. Fox said, still making his voice soft, and then I heard him come pattering along.

"Then was the time when Sonny Bunny should have scooted for dear life, but the little fellow hadn't had experience with bad wood folks and laid snug when he might have got away. It seemed to me that I was in a pickle, for if

Mr. Fox came up while I was in the raspberry bushes I'd be likely to go home to supper with him, unless I got a fair chance to show how fast I could run, so I kept on yelling for help and Mr. Fox he kept trying to soothe me so's the rest of the folks who might be hungry shouldn't come up to invite me to a stew.

"You'd better believe I made the dirt fly, trying to back out of the place I'd gone into with the idea of helping Sonny Bunny, and it seemed as if I were getting into a worse hole every minute, when I heard something that made my blood run cold—it's a great wonder my hair didn't turn white. It was that soft, whirring noise the 'Squire makes when he flies and it looked as if I'd miss my share of the lettuce and carrots I'd spent so much time gathering.

"I might as well confess that I got all mixed up with knowing that Mr. Fox was after me on one side and somewhere in the air was the 'Squire watching for a chance to stick his big claws in my back, to say nothing of the fact that Mr. Weasel might have heard what was going on.

"I just shut my eyes and waited, wondering which one would get at me first, and then,

suddenly, I heard a screech from Mr. Fox, with a yell from the 'Squire, at the same minute. I opened my eyes in a hurry and poked my nose out to see what had happened, but there was such a mix-up that it was quite a while before I could see anything but fur and feathers swinging around together like mad.

" You can guess that I didn't think about trying to save myself from being scratched by the thorns on the raspberry bushes ; but dug out as quick as any rabbit ever did in this world, and oh, what a row I found going on ! It seems that the 'Squire had caught sight of Mr. Fox, and, thinking it was me, dove down on him without stopping to make sure what he was tackling, burying his claws so deep that he couldn't pull them out in a hurry. Just at that very minute Mr. Weasel, who sure enough had heard me yelling, sneaked up, and there's no need of saying that he made a spring for the 'Squire, catching him by the neck.

" Now you know that when Mr. Weasel once gets a grip he doesn't let go in a hurry, leastways, not until he's got the upper hand of whoever is between his teeth, and there the three were floundering around in a way that would have

made me laugh till I cried, if it hadn't been for poor little Sonny Bunny, who was most likely crouching in his uncle's old home so frightened that he didn't even know what his name was.

"I said to myself that if I missed this chance of getting away I might not have another, so off I started, but feeling mighty sorry that I couldn't stop to see the end of the row. Do you know that I had to go to the very lower end of my poor brother's house in order to get Sonny Bunny? He was so scared that it didn't seem as if he heard me when I hollered for him to come out, and I was forced to drag the little fellow by the back of the neck so far that it made my jaws ache, for he isn't as much of a light-weight as he used to be.

"After a while I managed to shake some sense into him, and off we started for home, knowing by the yelps and hootings that the fight was still going on, with Mr. Weasel holding his tongue all the while, but most likely sawing a good deal of wood. We found Sonny's mother in what was just the same as a fainting fit when we went into the house; she had worried so much about us both that she couldn't stand it any longer, and off she went into a regular spell

the minute she heard the patter of our feet on the dry leaves.

"Of course it took some time to bring her around all right, for I'm not a very good hand at such things, and Sonny is too young to be of much use in time of sickness, so I suppose the fight was ended before we had matters straightened out at home; but I wanted to sneak around through the bushes to see how the thing wound up, and I'd have done it, too, if Sonny's mother hadn't caught me by the ear, declaring that she'd suffered enough for one night, and I must stay with her and the baby.

"I'd have given a good deal to know how the row ended; but it was no use to argue with Mrs. Rabbit, so I put on my slippers and scurried around to help get dinner, for, goodness knows, it was time all three of us had something to eat. Nothing could have been better than those carrots, and I had eaten two, at the same time thinking what a fool I'd been for not bringing back more, when suddenly Sonny's mother threw up both paws as if she were dying, and before there was time to ask what had come over her, I heard the sound of some one scratching at our front door.

"I didn't dare even to wait long enough to quiet Mrs. Bunny, but off I ran through the hallway, which is very long in our house, as you may suppose, and before reaching the door I could smell Mr. Foxy Fox as plainly as I smell you this minute. Frightened? It seemed as if I couldn't put one paw before another, and for two or three minutes it looked as if I'd go home for supper with Mr. Fox. How he got out of the scrape with the 'Squire and Mr. Weasel I couldn't guess, except that those two were so busy with each other that he contrived to slip off quietly; but it didn't make very much difference to me just how it happened, for I had troubles of my own to look after.

"One thing was certain: that rascally old fox would have to do some digging before he could get at us, and I ran back to Mrs. Rabbit, who had pulled herself together a bit, holding her gently by the ears as I explained what was going on."

At this point Bunny stopped as if overcome by sad thoughts, and stroked his whiskers softly with one paw. To have broken in on his train of thought just then would have been downright cruelty; therefore it seemed necessary to wait until he was ready to continue the painful story.

CHAPTER V

A MEETING OF THE CLUB

Mr. Bunny Rabbit remained silent a long while, as if occupied with painful thoughts, although in view of what he said later, it was difficult to understand why he should have been sad, for there have been but few of his family who, having received a visit from Mr. Fox, live to tell the tale.

Then he continued :

"Mrs. Bunny was so frightened by what I told her that it looked very much as if she would die of fright ; but Sonny Bunny and I rubbed her ears hard, until we finally brought her around to that point where she was able to look danger in the face as one of our kind should, but, I am sorry to say, seldom does.

"'If you could prevent the old robber from getting in for a time, Sonny and I might be able to dig out at the other end,' she said at length, and I fancied her idea was a good one ; but how it might be possible to keep Mr. Foxy Fox back was a hard question to answer.

"However, it was a case of putting my best foot forward, and I crept back down the hallway, so frightened that I had the hardest kind of work to walk straight. The murdering old scoundrel was scratching dirt at a lively rate when I came as near the front door as I dared, and it didn't take more than half an eye to see that he'd soon be able to get considerably more than his nose inside.

"Then the idea came to me that I might do a little scratching, and, turning around until my tail was pointed straight for the front door, I kept my hind feet at work till Foxy began to cough and choke at a rate that made me feel as if I were doing a pretty good job.

"'Look here, you long-eared old hopper, you! Stop kicking up so much dust, or I'll chew you into shoe-strings when I get at you!' he cried, and I knew from the sounds that he was trying to wipe the dirt from his eyes.

"'Yes, and that's what you count on doing whether I kick up a dust or not,' I said, speaking as if I were as brave and big as Senator Bear. 'If you eat rabbit stew for supper to-night, you'll have to work for it, that's what!'

"It was quite a spell before he went to work

again, and I sat there ready to use my hind feet the minute he had his nose anywhere near the door, knowing all the while that Mrs. Bunny and Sonny were working for dear life at the other end of the house.

"I hadn't much more than begun to scratch gravel again when I heard the sharpest kind of a yelp from Mr. Fox, and I couldn't help laughing out loud, for I thought I'd most likely sent a stone into his eye; but I soon found out that wasn't the cause of it.

"Now what do you think had happened? Why, Mr. Man's boy Tommy's dog Towser had happened along just in the nick of time, so far as I was concerned, and dear me! how he was jumping into Mr. Foxy Fox! Talk about fighting! I never heard such a row. As I afterward learned, nearly every member of our club was awakened by the racket, and you might have searched them all without finding anything like pity for Foxy.

"We never had any love for Mr. Towser before; but now it seemed as if he were the very nicest kind of animal that ever lived. I knew Mr. Fox was bound to get the worst of it, so back I ran to tell Mrs. Bunny. When she heard

the good news, instead of sitting down with me to laugh, she said real sharp-like:

"'Don't get to feeling good too soon, Bunny. Nobody knows how many wicked animals will come around to see what is going on, and when Mr. Towser finishes the job we may find ourselves nearer to a stew than before. Sonny and I have nearly finished making another door, and the best thing you can do is to close up the front one while Mr. Foxy Fox and Mr. Towser are so busy. Then we'll go over and visit your cousins till we can build a new house, for I wouldn't stay in this one another night.'

"When Mrs. Bunny really sets her mind on anything, the easiest way for me is to give in to her, and back I went, scratching the dirt against the door the best I knew how, though I was aching to listen, so's to know how long Mr. Fox held out.

"I hadn't more than done my part of the work in good shape when Mrs. Bunny came to tell me that she and Sonny Bunny had fixed things at the other end, so I went with her because she was dragging me by one ear in a way that wasn't comfortable. We found my cousins hopping around outside their home listening

to the row, for Foxy was taking on at such a rate that you might have heard him half a mile away, and none of us went to bed until the sudden stillness told that Mr. Foxy Fox wouldn't steal another chicken, nor ever disturb a member of our family.

"It wasn't more than daybreak next morning when Mr. Crow sent one of Cheeko's brothers around to tell the members of the club that there was to be a meeting, on important business, as soon as the sun came out strong enough to prevent any of the 'Squire's family from showing themselves.

"I didn't stop for breakfast, but started right off, and on arriving at the big oak found almost everybody I knew, except those club members who don't care to meet at meal time. Mr. Crow was perched on the very tiptoppest branch of the tree, looking as if he had so much business on hand that he couldn't speak without forgetting some of it, and I asked little Cocky Robin if he knew why the meeting was to be held.

"'Don't you know what happened last night?' he asked, looking as if he thought something was wrong in my head.

"'I've got good reasons to know, seeing's how

I was right in the thick of it,' I said, bristling up my fur so's to make me look mighty fierce. 'If it hadn't been for me Mr. Towser wouldn't have had such a chance at Mr. Fox.'

"'What did you have to do with it?' he asked, cocking his head in what I always thought a most impudent manner. Do you know, he puts on more airs and graces than a peacock, simply because he's the only bird that has a red vest to go with a brown coat? Of course I told him the whole story, though there wasn't any need for me to say that I'd been frightened nearly out of my wits, and before I'd finished Mr. Crow called the meeting to order.

"You know how well the old fellow loves to talk, and it seemed on this morning as if his tongue ran on wheels. He began by telling all about the row which Mr. Weasel kicked up with the 'Squire, and it seems, according to his story, that the head of the Owl family had been killed, as he had a good right to be after Mr. Weasel got a grip on his neck. Then he spoke about the trouble Mr. Foxy Fox had caused us members of the club, and announced that the long-tailed villain was dead, too, with his skin, most likely, nailed up on Mr. Man's barn that very minute.

"Never a word did Mr. Crow say about what I'd done toward fixing Foxy so he couldn't do any more mischief, and try as I might, I couldn't get in a word edgewise in the way of explaining that if it hadn't been for me Mr. Man's boy Tommy's dog Towser wouldn't have had a chance to get the best of Mr. Foxy Fox.

"All hands of us were pretty well tired out before Mr. Crow got right down to the business of the meeting, and I was seriously thinking of hopping off home without waiting to hear why we had been called together, when he came to the point.

"'There's no more influential club in the big woods than the Fur and Feather Association,' he said, speaking in a dreadfully hoarse voice because of having talked so long that his throat was dry. 'It is time we took an active part in outside affairs, else we may expect to lose many a night's sleep by such a rumpus as was kicked up last night.'

"'What do you count on doing about it?' Mr. Blue Jay, who had come in late, asked with a laugh. 'If Mr. Weasel meets 'Squire Owl when he's out on one of his killings, how can we stop him from murdering the pompous old

bird who has done some harm to nearly every one of us? And if Mr. Man's boy Tommy's dog Towser comes across Mr. Foxy Fox when he's up to mischief, how can we lend a hand, even if we want to? It seems to me that last night's work was a good thing for us members of the Fur and Feathers, and we're the last who should be mourning over it.'

"Mr. Crow looked at Mr. Jay savagely; but it takes more than a hard look to disturb that blue-coated fellow, and instead of being frightened, he actually laughed in the president's face.

"'We haven't come together to mourn because the 'Squire and Mr. Foxy Fox got themselves killed,' Mr. Crow said, ruffling up his feathers till he looked a good deal like Mr. Porcupine. 'Our duty is to take such measures as will prevent people like Mr. Weasel and Mr. Man's boy Tommy's dog Towser from disturbing the peace. This part of the big woods belongs by rights to this club, and we must take such steps as will prevent evilly disposed people from jumping down on those of us who mind our own business without working harm to any one else.'

"Now do you know that seemed to sound

very comical to Mr. Jay, and he didn't have any better manners than to laugh right out in meeting, making such a racket with that shrill voice of his that you'd have thought more than a dozen birds were trying to see which could make the most noise.

"Mr. Crow waited till the ill-mannered Jay had quieted down a bit, and I could see that the old fellow had all he could do to keep his temper, which is not to be wondered at when you consider that the president of the club was only trying to protect the members against those who had no business in that part of the big woods. Then he said, turning to some of us of the Fur section, who were not so impudent as to interrupt:

"'There is no reason why we should not forbid certain birds and animals from venturing on these premises, and once that has been done we shall live in peace, to say nothing of being able to sleep the whole night through without interruption.'

"There was so much good sense in this remark that I clapped my paws to show my appreciation of it, when suddenly we heard a dreadfully rough voice cry:

"'Are you foolish creatures really thinking it'll do any good to forbid our doing this or that?'

"Looking up quickly, whom should I see but the Professor, who was slowly circling around the tree as if trying to make up his mind which of us he would invite to breakfast. Oh me! oh my! what a scurrying there was to get under cover! I went into the thorn bushes head first, nearly scratching my eyes out, and Cheeko's brother followed close at my heels, while as for Mr. Jay, he flew off with a screech, for more than one member of his family had gone to dinner with the Professor and never come back.

"Then, if you'll believe it, that miserable hawk lighted on the very lowest branch of the tree, where he could have an eye on all of us who had taken to cover, and Cheeko's brother said to me, his teeth chattering with fear so badly that I could hardly understand a word:

"'Now we're in the soup for certain! If one of us makes the littlest kind of move that villainous old Professor will pounce down. I wish Mr. Crow had attended to his own private matters instead of calling us together where, rather

than protecting ourselves, we're likely to give that old scoundrel a breakfast.'

"'Keep under the sharpest thorns, no matter how badly your coat may be torn,' I whispered, and the Professor cocked his eye at me in a way that told he was figuring how he could best get his claws in my back."

At this moment Mr. Bunny chanced to see a particularly tempting bunch of clover, and he leaped toward it, without seeming to consider that it would have been more polite first to bring his story to a close.

CHAPTER VI

MR. MAN'S BOY TOMMY

"I SUPPOSE you think I'd have shown better manners if I'd asked you to excuse me before I lit out for that clover, eh?" Mr. Bunny Rabbit asked, as he hopped up on the log with his mouth filled with clover heads and leaves. "The trouble is that you don't know much of anything about it," he added, chewing meditatively on the green delicacy, while he gazed at a clump of ferns as if fancying it concealed an enemy.

"If you were better acquainted with us wood folk, you'd know that Jimmy Hedgehog is hiding over there in the ferns. Watch and you can see them waving directly against the wind, which tells that something heavy is moving among them. When I caught sight of those delicious clover heads I could see that young hedgehog was getting ready to go for them. The only thing that held him back was the fear that you might try to make trouble for

him. I had to scoop them up lively, or they'd gone into Jimmy's stomach while you were asking questions. I may not be able to make such a terrible show of fighting; but when it comes to getting the best of whatever is being passed around your Mr. Bunny Rabbit doesn't often get left, more especially if Jimmy Hedgehog is the only fellow he has to beat.

"Oh, yes, I was telling how the club meeting wound up when Professor Hawk came around to make trouble. Well, as I was saying, Cheeko's brother and I were snuggled together under the thorns, watching that wicked bird out of both eyes and thanking our lucky stars that the old 'Squire wasn't alive to take a hand in the game. Then that foolish squirrel got it into his head that he could run faster than the Professor could fly, and declared that he wasn't going to get the life scratched out of him simply because a hungry bird had made up his mind to eat us.

"'I'm going right out, as a decent fellow should who doesn't want others to call him a coward, and you'll see how I'll get the best of the smartest hawk that ever lived," he said, shaking his tail as well as he could amid the thorns.

"'Now, you're talking like Cheeko and showing yourself to be just as foolish,' I said, trying hard not to let him see that I was angry because he hadn't better sense. 'If your brother hadn't tried to prove that he wasn't a coward he wouldn't be sick in bed this very minute. You'd better stay where you are, for you won't find many such snug hiding places as this, not if you search the big woods from one end to the other.'

"'If I couldn't take care of myself better than you do I'd hide my head,' he said, pert as you please. 'Of course, it isn't right to expect very much of a fellow whose hind legs are twice as long as his front ones, and I don't suppose you can help being afraid of your own shadow.'

"Now, I'm willing to admit that I'm not the bravest animal that ever lived; but it isn't pleasant to be talked to in such a manner by an impudent youngster like Cheeko's brother, and I resolved that I wouldn't open my mouth again, no matter what folly he might attempt. Because I held my tongue he thought he'd make me ashamed of myself, and went on worse than ever, saying that he wasn't afraid of the Professor, with all his family behind

him; that he wouldn't stay among the thorns any longer than he pleased and a lot of cheap talk like that which went to prove that he was as impolite as he was silly.

"All the while he ran on like that he kept working his way through the thorns, and I could see that the Professor had his eye on him sharp as a needle. Cheeko's family are all alike, forever thinking they must do something, no matter how foolish, to show that they are dreadfully brave, when, according to my way of thinking, they are only proving themselves silly.

"Well, Cheeko's brother kept creeping nearer and nearer to the edge of the thorns, looking back at me every once in a while, as if believing I'd be scared out of my wits because he was so venturesome; but I never opened my mouth and finally he said with a flirt of his tail:

"'Now's the time when I will show that old hawk how much he knows about catching squirrels!'

"It was exactly as Cheeko would have spoken, and I could but feel sorry for him even though he had insulted me. He stood at the edge of the thorn bushes a minute, twisting

and turning his tail as if he wanted to attract the attention of every member of the club to his folly, and then out he went, running the best he knew how across the open space at the foot of the tree.

"Now if you've ever had any acquaintance with the Professor, you know he's not slow by any means, and Cheeko's brother had given him all the notice he needed that the foolish squirrel was going to show off before the other wood folks. Mr. Weasel himself couldn't have moved more quickly than the Professor did. I saw him twist his head as if to get a better view, and then down he came faster than you could wink your eye.

"Of course Cheeko's brother didn't have half a chance; he hadn't much more than well begun to run when the Professor had him in his claws, and oh me! oh my! how that squirrel did squeal! It wasn't any use to howl after he'd just the same as coaxed the Professor to catch him, and there wasn't a member of the club who didn't insist that he'd been served exactly right.

"'If an animal is brave there isn't any need of his running around telling people,' Mr. Crow

said when the Professor and Cheeko's brother had disappeared. 'But if he sticks his nose into danger just for the sake of showing folks how clever he is he not only shows that he is mistaken as to the meaning of the word brave, but has proven himself very foolish.'

"You may believe it or not, but it's the solemn truth that there wasn't one of the wood folk who felt sorry for Cheeko's brother, and that's saying a good deal, for as a rule we're all broken up when anything like that happens, especially when it is done right on the club's premises.

"'Cheeko himself will come to just such an end, and for that you may take my word,' Mr. Jay said as he straightened out his feathers, which had been ruffled a good bit when he flew off so suddenly to get out of the Professor's way.

"'We'll hope that the lesson he has just had will teach him to have better sense in the future,' Mr. Crow replied, for the old fellow always looks on the bright side of everything, and Mr. Jay added in an angry tone:

"'But it won't and that you may depend on. I've lost all patience with the Squirrel family. They go chattering and scolding around as if

they owned the whole of the big woods, and I've yet to see one of them raise a paw toward helping a neighbor.'

"Before any one else could speak we heard a terrible noise among the bushes and had no more than well hidden ourselves when up comes Mr. Man's boy Tommy with one of those miserable slings on a forked stick, and it went without saying that he had a lot of small stones in his pocket ready to shoot at the first one of us, even including Mr. Crow, who should show himself. Of course, he can't kill anything with such a toy; but it is possible for him to hurt a fellow mighty bad, as I know to my cost.

"Why, do you know, not a great while ago I was hopping across the path that leads to Mr. Man's barn, when that wretched boy aimed straight for me, and, what's a great deal worse, hit me with a small stone just behind the ears. I really thought for the moment that I had got what I'd never recover from! I did manage to hobble away, of course, else I wouldn't be here to-day; but my head ached for two or three days as though it would split open. I can't for the life of me imagine why boys find so much sport in hurting animals.

WE HEARD A TERRIBLE NOISE AMONG THE BUSHES

"Well, there was the boy Tommy, and in his hand was the sling, with a little stone in it ready to be fired. Mr. Crow had crept around the trunk of the tree, hoping to keep out of sight; but the boy, looking for something to shoot at, espied the old bird, and in another second the president of the club flew away crying 'Caw, caw, caw' with all his strength. Mr. Man's boy Tommy shot at him, but Mr. Crow wasn't there, so he didn't get hit.

"It seemed to me that the moment had come when I should take to my heels, for I was hidden only by a few mullein leaves, and Tommy wouldn't have to hunt very long before he stumbled right over me. While he was putting another stone in the sling I jumped out from under the leaves, and headed straight for home, but unluckily for me, the boy got a glimpse of the tip of my tail, short though it is, as I darted through a clump of alders.

"Now it so happened that lying on the ground where he could get at it handily was a piece of half-decayed wood, which had most likely fallen from the big oak a long while before, and, if you'll believe it, that boy had time to pick it up and shy the thing at me

before I got out of sight. Not once in a hundred times could he have hit me; but it so happened that this was the unfortunate once, and I was knocked head over heels into the brook, so nearly stunned that I was almost drowned before I came to myself.

"When I did get my senses that miserable boy was just reaching out his hand to pick me up, and you never saw a rabbit struggle as I did then! Being in the water, and not knowing how to swim, it was quite a task to get out quickly. More than once he had his fingers on my ears; but each time I contrived to wriggle away, and at the very moment when it seemed as if I must give up and go into the stew or pie, as his mother should decide, I gave him the slip.

"I was wet as a drowned rat; the mud stuck to my hair until it seemed as if my coat were twice as heavy as usual, and I was sore all over from the blow; but yet I could run faster than he, and if ever a rabbit put his best foot forward, it was I! I had never believed he could move as quickly as he did then, and no matter how I struggled he kept uncomfortably near my heels till just as I darted around a clump of mullein

stalks whom should I come plump upon but Mrs. Rabbit herself.

"'Gracious me, Bunny, what a disgraceful condition you are in!' she cried, holding up both front paws and getting ready to read me one of her long lectures; but I swung her around by the ears as I said, speaking queerly, I suppose, because of breathing so hard after the long chase:

"'Don't stop here to talk if you want to save your skin! Mr. Man's boy Tommy has nearly killed me, and he can't be far away this very minute. Run, run for your life!'

"Sometimes Mrs. Rabbit is a very sensible animal, and on this occasion she took my advice, running at full speed, especially when she heard Tommy cry:

"'By Jiminy! Now I've got two rabbits! Come on, fellers, the woods are full of 'em!'

"Of course we knew by the words that there was more than one boy out with slings, and I was so tired that it didn't seem as if I could run another inch! When I was knocked into the brook I somehow was turned around, so that I was headed away from home, and we had a long, long distance to go before there was the

littlest kind of a show for safety. It seemed as if matters were just as bad as they could be; but it appears that they were not, for just then who should pop out of some tall grass but my poor little Sonny Bunny, and those dreadful boys so close behind that I could almost hear them breathe."

At this point Mr. Bunny ceased speaking, and began to chew a straw, as if seeing in his mind's eye the picture of that wild race for life.

CHAPTER VII

CHEEKO'S CURIOSITY

Mr. Bunny remained silent a long while, and not until he was reminded that he had broken off his story at a very exciting point did he continue. Then it was to say :

"Even at this day I am surprised that all three of us were not captured by that army of boys, each of whom was armed with one of those disagreeable sling-shots, pea-shooters, or whatever you choose to call them. I was panting from long running, and my wife so excited as hardly to know whether she was on her feet or her ears, while poor little Sonny Bunny was so confused by seeing us in such a state that he actually quivered.

"Of course I had sense enough to know that we hadn't a single second to spare in that neighborhood, and it was up to me to save the family, or go down into the stew with them. I don't like to boast, as do the Squirrels ; but yet I must say that, except when we come face to face with

Mr. Weasel, we Rabbits can do a powerful lot of thinking in a short time when we are in a hole—or, perhaps I should say, when we want to get into our own particular hole.

"I twisted one of Mrs. Rabbit's ears right sharp, to bring her to her senses quickly, and jumping straight for Sonny Bunny, tossed him around with my nose, as I whispered:

"'Run for your life, Sonny, and run as you never did before. It's up to you to see that your mother gets home before those wicked boys can lay their hands on her, so move lively!'

"Sonny Bunny is a good deal like me in some things, and it was as if the little fellow understood the whole situation in a sniff of your nose. Before you could say Jack Robinson, in case you wanted to, he was showing his mother the way home, his little legs twinkling like drumsticks amid the bushes.

"Mrs. Bunny and Sonny hadn't much more than disappeared when Mr. Man's boy Tommy was almost the same as walking all over me, and I had to do some mighty lively hopping to keep out from under his feet. Now I'm not trying to make myself out the bravest fellow that ever walked; but it is a fact that I had

sense enough not to run straight for home, as I knew the rest of the family were doing, and when that busy Tommy caught a glimpse of me, I was steaming off as if we lived in the very middle of the big swamp. Of course he came after me with a whoop and a yell and, if the noise was anything to be judged by, there were more than a hundred other boys close at his heels.

"I wasn't fretting very much just then, because I'd had a breathing spell, to say nothing of knowing that Mrs. Bunny and Sonny were clean out of the muss, so off I went limperty, limperty, limp, taking my own time and leading that crowd of boys and sling-shots straight into the swamp, where I was allowing they'd pitch head over heels into the mud till they were in such shape that their mothers couldn't help whipping them soundly when they got home.

"Mr. Man's boy Tommy wasn't quite so simple as I'd taken him to be, for when he came to the edge of the swamp he fired one shot that never came anywhere near touching me, and yelled to the fellows behind:

"'Hold up, or we'll be in the mud up to our necks! What's the use of chasing a lot of

rabbits that aren't worth eating at this time of year, when we can catch more'n a thousand squirrels between now and to-morrow morning?'

"Then all the crowd began to yell—I wonder why it is that boys must make a terrible noise whatever they are doing?—and back the whole of them trooped, heading as if they counted on bringing up at Crow's Corner.

"I didn't have any very important business on hand just then, for it isn't pleasant to go home when Mrs. Bunny is all haired up with excitement, because at such times she seems to think matters may be smoothed by scolding at me, so off I hopped after the yelling, screaming cannibals, counting on finding out what other mischief that boy Tommy had hatched. Of course I kept so far behind that they couldn't see me, and my mouth was stretched from ear to ear in a broad grin, thinking how surprised they'd be to know I was taking my turn at chasing them.

"They struck a bee-line for the club quarters, and on arriving there loitered around with never a thought that there were plenty of chores to be done at the farm, till I was tired of trying to see what was going on, so off I hopped, counting on

paying Cheeko a visit to liven him up a bit. I hadn't got more than half-way to his new home when whom should I see but that same squirrel I supposed was so sick he couldn't even flirt his tail!

"'What's all this row about?' he asked, cross as two sticks, and acting as if he blamed me because the little wretches from the farm had been making so much noise.

"I told him all that had happened, and, if you'll believe it, instead of appreciating what I had done in the way of getting my family out of the scrape, he said, with his nose turned way up in the air:

"'You're always trying to make out that you've done something mighty smart, Bunny. I can't see how it was possible for you to act in any way different from what you did. If I'd been there those boys would be singing another kind of a tune by this time.'

"'It seems to me that you've brightened up considerably since Mrs. Bunny dosed you with the herb tea,' I said, speaking a bit crossly, perhaps, for it got on my nerves to have him so pert all of a sudden, and pitching into me just the same as before he got hurt.

"'If I'd taken very much of that nasty tea I'd be dead by this time, and I want you to tell Mrs. Bunny that I'll just about whip the life out of Sonny Bunny if she ever tries to get any more of that stuff down my throat. I was only shaken up a little, and as soon as you meddling people let me alone, I came around all right. Now I'm going to drive those boys out of the club premises. If James Crow can't look after things at such a time, as a president should, I'll teach him a lesson!'

"It provoked me to hear the foolish squirrel talking like that at a time when he'd better have been in bed attending to himself; but I'm so soft-hearted that it really made me feel badly to hear of his anxiety to get into more trouble before he was well out of the scrape with the Professor, and I said in the most friendly way you can imagine:

"'Now look here, Cheeko, it'll be wiser for you to go straight back home and stay there till your coat is mended in better shape, for if one of those boys should get a fair shot at you, as they did at me, there'd be one squirrel the less in the big woods. Why don't you take warning from your poor brother's fate?'

"Now I ask you if I said anything which one friend shouldn't have said to another at such a time, and yet, do you know, Cheeko went away into the air with anger. You'd thought I'd really insulted him; he bristled up his tail, swinging it around over his ears exactly as before he got hurt, and shouted at me:

"'Look here, Bunny Rabbit, I'll have you understand that I don't want any advice from you! What does a burlesque imitation of a see-saw like you know about fellows in my class? From this time on you'll keep your tongue between your teeth when I'm anywhere around, else both your eyes will be knocked into one, and don't you forget it!'

"I had a good deal more than half a mind to tell him I could swallow such as he without standing any chance of being troubled with dyspepsia, or kick him into the middle of next week without straining my legs; but I didn't want to stir up a row, particularly while those boys were so near that they might have taken a hand in it, so off I hopped; but you may be certain I didn't go very far away on account of wanting to see what Cheeko would be foolish enough to do. I hid behind a lot of mullein

leaves, where it was possible to see what was going on near Crow's Corner, and it wasn't necessary to wait very long before that foolish squirrel came up against all he was looking for, and a little more.

"Cheeko and I had been talking quite a while, and when I was where a view of the club premises could be had, my surprise was great because not a single boy was to be seen. I had supposed we'd have them loitering around nearly all day, and why they went away so quickly was more than I could make out. It was while I was trying to solve the mystery that I saw, at the very foot of the old oak, the dearest little house that ever was built. Some careless person had left the door wide open, and there, in full view of any dishonest person who might be passing, was a large ear of corn. It seemed queer that the thing should have appeared there so suddenly; but yet I never suspected that Mr. Man's boy Tommy had anything to do with it until I heard Mr. Crow calling out in his hoarsest voice:

"'You'd better get away from that thing, Cheeko Squirrel, unless you're aching to spend the rest of your days in jail!'

"Then it was I saw Cheeko running around

and around the house, looking at it from every point, and chattering in that crazy way of his until you would have thought there were at least a dozen squirrels near about.

"'I reckon I can do what I please without any interference from you, Jim Crow!' Cheeko cried with that exasperating chuckle of his. 'I wasn't brought up in these woods to be scared by an owl, or a crow either, for that matter. When I'm wanting advice from you I'll ask for it.'

"'You'd better ask quickly, if there's any idea in your head of going into that place,' Mr. Crow said, never seeming to lose his temper, though it must have been terribly trying for one of his age and experience to have a young thing like Cheeko speak so saucily. 'I saw Mr. Man's boy Tommy when he put that house there, and he took good care that the corn should be seen by any who passed. Now he never has been very careful to do folks a good turn, so I'm advising you to keep your nose out of the place, for it must be a trap of some kind.'

"'I reckon I know as much about what's what as any old crow that ever cawed,' Cheeko said with a laugh, as he ran around to the front

of the house and looked in. 'Mr. Man's boy Tommy knows too much to set a trap for me, and I'm going to teach him a lesson on the folly of leaving good corn where I can get my paws on it.'

"'Don't go in there, Cheeko!' I cried, forgetting how impertinent he had been, and a moment later felt sorry I had spoken, for he cried as he shook his tail with that seasick motion:

"'Mind your own business, old hopperty-skip!'

"Then he made one leap for the corn, counting, I suppose, on dragging it out in a hurry, but he hadn't much more than touched it when bang! down came the door, with Mr. Cheeko inside, and he had found out whether Mr. Man's boy Tommy knew too much to set a trap for him.

"'That settles Cheeko!' Mr. Crow cried from his perch on the tree. 'He'll stay where he is till Tommy gets ready to take him out.'

"'Can't we open the thing?' I cried, running toward the foot of the tree, arriving there just as Jimmy Hedgehog stuck his nose out of a hole near at hand to see what was

going on. 'Tip it over, Jimmy; Cheeko is inside!'"

Just then a very small rabbit thrust his ears out from amid the leaves near at hand, and Mr. Bunny leaped down from the log as he cried in a tone of joyful surprise:

"Why, here's my little Sonny Bunny! Whatever is he doing so far from home?"

CHAPTER VIII

JIMMY HEDGEHOG'S ESCAPE

Mr. Bunny Rabbit hopped around his little Sonny, rubbing noses with him, smoothing the rumpled fur on his back, and otherwise behaving as if he had not seen him for a very long time. When these marks of affection had been displayed, Sonny rose on his hind feet as if to look his father directly in the face, and, wrinkling his nose in a peculiar manner, seemingly began to tell a very long story, to which Mr. Bunny listened attentively, wagging his ears now and then in token of admiration or disapproval.

When Sonny had finally come to an end of the recital, he crouched on all fours directly under his father's nose and began nibbling at some young raspberry leaves which were growing conveniently near at hand, looking very much as if he was waiting for an answer to his long story or explanation, whichever it may have been.

Mr. Bunny stroked his chin as if in deep thought for several seconds; peered cautiously around for signs of danger, scrutinized closely every bush and clump of ferns in the vicinity, after which he began to talk earnestly to Sonny Bunny. It surely seemed as if he were giving him certain explicit directions concerning what should be done, for when he had come to a close the father and son rubbed noses once more, after which the youngster hopped away while Mr. Bunny resumed his position of story-teller on the log.

"Nice looking young rabbit, isn't he?" Mr. Bunny asked as he watched solicitously until Sonny disappeared from view amid the foliage. "No fellow could ask for a better son than my little Sonny Bunny; I can count on his doing exactly what I tell him, and he never goes away from home without asking permission from his mother or me.

"Why did he come? Oh, his mother sent him to tell me that Mr. Man had just gone out with his gun, and Towser tagging on behind. She was afraid he had started off to find me simply because I took a few carrots and some lettuce the other day. I'll have my eye on him

sharp enough; but it was taking a big risk to send little Sonny out at such a time. I explained to him exactly the route he must take when going home, and cautioned the dear fellow about going into the open without first making certain that crafty dog wasn't anywhere near at hand.

"Oh, yes, you want to hear the rest of the story about Cheeko. Well, there isn't a great deal more to tell, I'm sorry to say—that is, about his being trapped by Mr. Man's boy Tommy, though he did get away after a long and painful experience which has taught him a valuable lesson, so Mr. Crow says.

"As I was saying when Sonny Bunny interrupted us, I yelled for Jimmy Hedgehog to tip the little house over with his nose; but you know what a clumsy thing he is, and it seemed as if I should fly before he got ready to make a try. While he was poking around to see how it could be done the easiest, I scratched away the dirt with my hind feet, making a hole for it to tumble into, and, last, when Jimmy had made up his mind, I shouted for Cheeko to look after himself when the thing fell, so's to be ready to jump out the minute the door opened.

"Now you'd better believe Jimmy and I worked hard and fast, for there was no telling how soon those miserable boys might be back, and all the time old Mr. Crow was perched on the top of the oak tree, giving orders as if he were the captain of the biggest vessel that ever floated.

"'Get your noses further under the house!' he screamed when it seemed to me as if my whole head was in the dirt, and I'd strangle to death if I'd rooted the least bit deeper. 'Why don't you have some get up and go to you?' he yelled again and again until I just couldn't stand it any longer, even if he was the president of the club, and up and told him I wouldn't ruffle a hair till he got through with his foolish noise.

"That made him real kind of huffy, and while he was shaking himself to make his feathers stand out like Jimmy's quills, we rooted at the house till it surely seemed I'd dropped a stitch in my back, and over she went, plump into the hole I'd dug. Now wouldn't you have thought that the door would open when the thing fell? Cheeko declared that he couldn't see the least little bit of a crack

when it tipped, and after that it was all over, so far as Cheeko Squirrel was concerned, because the house was bottom up, resting on the top of the door in such a way that a dozen rabbits and hedgehogs, with more'n a hundred crows to boss 'em, couldn't have moved it.

"Jimmy and I rooted and rooted the best we knew how, with Cheeko coaxing and crying all the time, promising never to be impudent to us again if we'd only get him out of the terrible fix; but it was no use. He was in a bad box and there was nothing we could do to help him.

"'We've both worn the skin all off our noses and can't stir it a little bit,' I said, feeling mighty sorry for the little fellow, even if he had been rude to me whenever I had tried to do him a good turn.

"'Try it just once more, Bunny, dear!' he cried, and his voice sounded as if there were tears in it. 'Don't let that wicked boy, Tommy, carry me off to one of his miserable prisons!'

"'You wouldn't take the advice of those who were older and more experienced in the world and now you must pay the price for being headstrong,' Mr. Crow cawed, and it made me pro-

voked to hear him reading a lesson to poor Cheeko when he was in such a peck of trouble, so I said, speaking as easy as I knew how:

"'There's no use telling him about what has been done, Mr. President. He knows all that only too well, and we'd better spend what little time we've got before Mr. Man's boy Tommy comes back in trying to make him feel better.'

"'He would have the dose, no matter what we could say, and, according to my way of thinking, it's high time he was brought up with a sharp turn, for he had got it into his head that he owned pretty near all the big woods,' Mr. Crow said, and then he flew off to watch for Tommy, so's to give us fair warning, for however sharp the old fellow may talk his heart is always in the right place when it comes to helping us wood folks who behave ourselves.

"Well, Jimmy and I kept on trying to turn the box over again until we heard Mr. Crow calling out that the boys were coming and then it was up to us to get out of the way unless we were willing to go further with Cheeko than would be at all pleasant.

"'We've got to skip,' I whispered to him, putting my mouth close to the crack of the door

and before I could get away he cried, oh! so mournfully:

"'Please don't leave me, Bunny, dear, when I'm in such terrible trouble!'

"Dear knows, I'd have stayed by him until the cows came home if I could have done the poor fellow any good, but I couldn't, and the tears almost blinded me as I hopped off into the bushes just in time to be well hidden before that gang of young ruffians came up.

"'Hurrah! We've got a squirrel!' Mr. Man's boy Tommy cried as he picked up the box and squinted into it. 'Hurry and we'll put him into that cage we made yesterday!'

"Then off the whole crowd ran, and poor Cheeko with them. I'd forgotten all about Jimmy Hedgehog, because of feeling so sorry for Cheeko, and was wiping my eyes with my ears, when he squeaked, poking his nose out of the hole he had dodged into when the boys came up:

"'What's the reason we shouldn't go and see what they do with Cheeko? It won't be much of a trick to keep out of sight and follow them at the same time.'

"I hadn't anything in particular to do just

then, and, if you'll believe it, I forgot that Mrs. Bunny had told me, not more than half an hour before, that Mr. Man was out trying to kill something.

"Off Jimmy and I went, Mr. Crow calling after us as he saw us hopping along in the direction of Mr. Man's barn:

"'You'd better take care of your own hides, instead of following that foolish Cheeko, who hasn't got a thing more than he deserved!'

"'You're a hard-hearted old bird!' Jimmy cried, and a deaf man could have told by the sound of his voice that he was angry. 'There's just a chance that we can help the poor fellow.'

"'Help nothing!' Mr. Crow cried sharply, and off he flew, as much as to say that he washed his claws of us both.

"Well, I couldn't help feeling just a bit nervous after the old bird had warned us; but yet, strange as it may seem, even then I didn't think of what Mrs. Bunny had told me about Mr. Man. I followed Jimmy, though, and it didn't take us long to come up so near the robbers that we could hear them telling what they counted on doing with poor Cheeko. From all I could make out, they had some kind of prison with a

wheel in it, and there he'd be made to run round and round till he couldn't run any more.

"Of course we had to hang back when coming within sight of the barn, and then I coaxed Jimmy to go back to the old oak; but he allowed he'd see the last of Cheeko no matter what might happen, and it really seemed as if I ought to stay with him after all he'd done in the way of helping me with the little house, so I told him I'd hang round for a spell; but I'd draw the line at going any nearer the barn.

"Well, we stayed there in the bushes a while without being able to see very much, although we could hear the boys talking, and then Jimmy said, speaking as if he were all out of patience with me:

"'I'm going to see what they are doing; if you're afraid you can wait here till I come back.'

"I said all I could to prevent him from running his nose into danger, as Cheeko had done, but he wouldn't listen, so I crept further into the bushes and off he toddled. How long I stayed there it would be hard to say, but it seemed as if two or three hours had passed when I heard Mr. Crow saying, his voice sounding as if he were a long distance away:

"'Look out for your hide, Jimmy Hedgehog, for here comes Mr. Man with a gun and a dog!'

"Then of course I remembered what Mrs. Bunny had told me and although I was so frightened that my teeth chattered I couldn't help creeping out a bit to see what Jimmy was doing. I had just got into a place where it was possible to have a full view of the barn, when whom should I see but that foolish Jimmy standing on his hind legs looking from one side to the other, but never behind him where was Mr. Man creeping along as if he were making ready to shoot.

"Oh me! oh my! how I tried to scream for him to turn around, but my lungs are not very strong, as you know, and I couldn't have made him hear me if he hadn't been half as far away, but Mr. Crow was on the watch and he screamed as he flew down almost directly across Jimmy's face:

"'Can't you see an inch behind your back, silly beast? I've been telling you over and over again that Mr. Man was out looking for such as you!'

"You never saw a hedgehog jump as Jimmy did then! He hadn't paid any attention to

anything except what the boys were doing, and now he made up for lost time. It seemed to me as if he turned more than four somersaults before he struck the ground, and even while he was leaping bang! went Mr. Man's gun. I couldn't see whether my friend had been hit or not—dear, dear, you'll have to excuse me a minute more, for there is Mrs. Bunny shaking her ears at me. Now, what do you suppose she has got on her mind?"

Then Mr. Bunny jumped off the log hurriedly running toward a bunch of ferns which were swaying to and fro, although there was not a breath of wind stirring and there was nothing to be done save wait until he should be at liberty to conclude the story.

CHAPTER IX

FOOLING MR. FOX

It was fully ten minutes before Mr. Bunny brought the conversation with his wife to a close, and then she hopped away as if very angry, looking over her shoulder now and then at him as he jumped up on the log again.

"Yes, that is Mrs. Bunny," he said with a sigh, as he stroked his whiskers thoughtfully. "Do you know, that foolish rabbit thinks I'm wasting my time, sitting here telling you stories about the club members, because she wanted me to run over to Mr. Man's farm for more young carrots. Upon my word I'm almost ashamed to call on him so often; it really seems as if I, and other members of the Rabbit family, had gathered more than half his crop already, and surely he ought to have a few after he has spent so much time planting them for us and his boy Tommy has very nearly broken his back at the weeding.

"There isn't the least little bit of danger in

running over there, especially if he has gone out with Towser, as she said, and I asked why it was that a big fellow like Sonny Bunny couldn't go after a few carrots when his father had other business on hand. Then, if you'll believe it, she almost the same as accused me of being willing to send Sonny into danger because I was afraid to go myself, and I the very rabbit who killed Grandfather Fox!

"Well, I didn't really put him out of the world with my own paws; but I led him into a trap where Mr. Man found him later, and if that isn't the same as killing him I'd like to know what it is? Mrs. Bunny is forever wanting carrots; if her head aches, there's nothing to be done but get young carrots, when they're in season, I mean. If she gets nervous about Sonny Bunny, then the only thing to straighten her out is a bunch of carrots, and so it goes on all the time, till I'm actually worn down to skin and bones ministering to her whims.

"How did I kill Grandfather Fox? That's a long story; but I'll tell it to you as soon as I finish with Jimmy Hedgehog's narrow escape, and surely he did have the slimmest squeak for his life that ever any animal had! When Mr.

Man's gun went off at the very minute Jimmy jumped, I thought for certain he was a gone hedgehog, and was wondering whether I couldn't get Mr. Crow to go and break the news to his family; but a minute later I saw the bushes waving furiously over by the stone wall. Then I looked around for the dead body, and so did Mr. Man, but it wasn't there. 'Cause why? 'Cause Jimmy wasn't anywhere near dead.

"How Mr. Man did scold because he didn't find any hedgehog lying around loose! He blamed it on the gun; then he declared that it was all owing to old Mr. Crow, and vowed he'd spend the rest of the week hunting for the president of the club, just because he had warned Jimmy. Well, he might hunt two weeks for Mr. Crow, and unless he came upon him when the old fellow was asleep, I'll answer for it he couldn't kill him, for the president of our club is always wide awake.

"Do you know, I've seen Mr. Man, his boy Tommy, and two of the servants, out looking for that same old crow, and shooting off their guns till you'd thought it was Fourth of July, and yet never a single tail feather belonging to Mr. Crow was rumpled. When you catch

Mr. Weasel asleep you may kill that bird ; but not before.

"Of course, when I saw that Jimmy had got away I started off after him, for it wasn't pleasant to stay there while Mr. Man was in such a rage, because he might try to get even with me on account of the carrots, so off I toddled, taking precious good care to keep under cover all the while, till I came to the big oak, and there was Jimmy, washing his face. I can't make out how he succeeds in doing it without nearly killing himself with the quills that stick up all over his body.

"'He never touched me!' Jimmy said with a grin, when he saw me, and I thought that was a good time to read him a lecture on the wicked folly of being so careless when he knew as well as I do that everybody on the farm is ready to kill one of the Hedgehog family, though why people should be so down on Jimmy's folks I can't make out, for they mind their business as a general rule.

"'You needn't talk to me,' Jimmy said before I'd more than half spoken what was in my mind. 'After that jump of mine I'll back myself against the whole farm gang.'

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"'But you'd have stood there like a silly till your head was shot off if it hadn't been for Mr. Crow,' I said, just a bit provoked because Jimmy seemed to take all the credit of the escape to himself.

"'How do you know?' he asked, speaking as pert as ever did Cheeko. 'You can't tell, but I was getting ready to jump at the very minute Mr. Crow came sailing around, as if he'd gone crazy.'

"Now what do you think of such talk as that from a fellow who had barely pulled through by the skin of his teeth? I didn't waste any more time on him, but walked off, and then was the time that I killed Grandfather Fox. You see the old fellow had been after my scalp more times than I've got claws on my paws, and it so happened that I always gave him the slip without trying very hard; but Mrs. Bunny had said to me over and over again:

"'Don't crow, Bunny; at least, don't crow so loud. Don't you know that pride goeth before a fall? Some day you'll meet Grandfather Fox where he'll have the best of it, and then Sonny will be without a father.'

"I made believe laugh, when Mrs. Bunny

said such things, but 'way down in my heart I was frightened, for it stood to reason that I couldn't always expect to come off best when I ran up against an old villain like him. But what could I do? You wouldn't expect that I'd stay at home every minute just because of being scared. Why, everybody in the big woods would be laughing at me worse than ever; they say now that I'm afraid of my own shadow, but it isn't true, as any one who ever saw me dancing in the moonlight can testify. Besides, it is my business as the head of the family to do the marketing, and if I laid at home snug Mrs. Bunny and Sonny would stand a chance of starving to death.

"You can put it down in your hat that I was mighty cautious, however, whenever I went out, for I said to myself that if Grandfather Fox ever got his teeth into my back it wouldn't be owing to my own carelessness.

"Well, as I was saying, I walked away when Jimmy Hedgehog began to make so much foolish talk, and just for the moment had forgotten all about that miserable fox, when whom should I see staring straight at me but the old fellow himself, and by the way he was licking

his chops I knew he felt certain I was his meat at last. But the matter wasn't settled by considerable, for he was on one side of a barbed-wire fence and I on the other, so there was something to be done before he could put me into a pie.

"You can make up your mind that I did a power of thinking in a few seconds, and even if I am just the least little bit cowardly when it comes to fighting, I'm a master hand at finding my way out of a bad scrape. That very morning I had seen Mr. Man and his boy Tommy setting a big steel trap down at the edge of the swamp on the very side of the fence I then was, and it seemed to me as if it might do me a world of good just at that time.

"'Good-morning, Grandfather,' I said, mild as milk, and staring at the wicked old fellow as if he were the best friend a lone rabbit could possibly have.

"'How well you look, Bunny,' he said, opening his mouth till I could see every tooth he had, and knew he was longing to stick them into me. 'I don't believe I ever saw a prettier coat than the one you have on. There was a time, after you had met the 'Squire, when it was rather ragged.'

"'I've had it mended since then,' and I laughed as if believing he had said something terribly funny, for, even if I'm not the bravest animal in the world, I wouldn't let a mangy old fox think I was afraid of him, no matter how scared I might be.

"'You and I haven't been very good friends in the past; but it isn't too late to change all that,' and he came close up to the fence as he spoke, while I looked over my shoulder to see that the way was clear for running, as I said:

"'I've always been busy when you wanted a chat; but now that we're on the opposite sides of a fence, and the barbs on the wires are mighty sharp, there's no reason why we shouldn't get better acquainted.'

"'That's what I would like,' and he grinned till I could see half-way down his throat. 'The only trouble is that I've got a dreadful cold, and it tears me all to pieces to speak loudly enough for you to hear. Why not come on this side, or wait till I can get over on that, and then we can talk at our leisure?'

"'That's what I'd like to do,' and I shook my ears in a way such as I knew provoked him; 'but Mrs. Bunny says that colds are catch-

ing, and I wouldn't like to run the chances of taking yours.'

"Then he wrinkled up his nose as he looked around to find a way to jump at me without taking the risk of getting torn pretty near to pieces on the barbs, and don't forget that I kept my ears moving mighty fast, for there was no telling when my legs would be needed to save my skin. It wasn't many seconds before I saw his tail begin to swing from one side to the other, and I knew he'd made up some plan in his mind, so I said free and easy like, but keeping my eye on the path all the while:

"'I know you'd like to have me stay with you longer, Grandfather Fox, but we're expecting company at our house to-night, and I must be moving, else Mrs. Bunny will begin to think I've fallen in with rogues. Perhaps when we meet again I'll have more time.'

"Then I started off limperty, limperty, limp, as if I weren't in any very great hurry, and the old fellow trotted along on the other side of the fence, watching out sharp for a chance to get through.

"It wasn't a great while before we came to where one of the wires had been broken, and I

knew that it was up to me to show how fast we rabbits could run, for he came through with a rush, as he snarled:

"'I reckon you'd better go home with me this time, Bunny. It so happens that my wife is expecting company, too, and she is needing a fat rabbit like you for dinner.'

"It would really have done your heart good if you could have seen how I skipped over the ground, with that red-mouthed old fellow so close behind that his breath actually ruffled the fur on my back. Just for a minute I began to think that I had taken too many chances, and would really go home with the villain, for one of his strides was equal to three or four of mine, and he was putting in his best licks, as I knew only too well, having been chased by him many a time before.

"Then, and it wasn't any too soon, I can tell you, we came to the clump of bushes where I knew Mr. Man and his boy Tommy had hidden the trap, and you'd better believe I gathered my legs under me for the jump of my life, for if I made a mistake then I was done for, sure.

"You'd thought I had wings by the way I went up into the air, counting on striking the

bushes near the top so's not to get caught, and as luck would have it, I hit the mark just right. Over I went quick as a shot, and in a jiffy I'd doubled back, getting under cover at the very moment when Grandfather Fox tried the jump.

"The old fellow wasn't as spry on his feet as he had been the last time we had a race, and when he came down, instead of clearing the bushes as I had done, he flopped right down into the middle of them. I heard a sharp click, and then such a howl as never was in the big woods before. Grandfather Fox had landed exactly where I counted he would!" and Bunny Rabbit rocked to and fro on the log, hugging his knees with his fore paws, laughing until it was absolutely impossible for him to continue his story for several minutes.

CHAPTER X

BOBBY COON'S TRICK

MR. BUNNY RABBIT laughed so long and so hard as he thought of how he had outwitted Grandfather Fox that it really seemed necessary to pat him vigorously on the back lest he should strangle and then two or three minutes more were wasted as he coughed and choked.

When this last spasm was at an end he wiped his eyes with the tips of his ears, as he said in an apologetic tone:

"I really couldn't help it, you know. To think that Grandfather Fox had chased me three or four times a year since I was old enough to run by myself, and that at last I should lead him into a trap from which he couldn't get out!"

Again Bunny gave way to his mirth, and for a time it really seemed as if the story never would be ended; but he finally drew his face down soberly, wiped his eyes again, and said, as he continued to rock back and forth with his knees in his paws:

"When I heard the old fellow yelping the way he never did before, I knew there wasn't any chance of his getting out of the trap, else he wouldn't have made such a terrible row for fear of letting Mr. Man know where he was, so I came out where he could see me, and oh, how ugly he did look!

"'So this is the mean kind of trick you fixed up to play on a poor old fox who never did you any harm?' he said with a whine, trying to look as if he'd always been a friend of mine.

"'You never did me any harm, Grandfather, because you couldn't catch me; but if you'd got your teeth in my back after coming across the fence, I reckon there isn't any question but that I'd been introduced to the company your wife has at home,' I said, keeping my ears bent over my back so's to get the first warning of when Mr. Man or his boy Tommy came up, as I know they would after a little while.

"'I was only trying to fool you, Bunny,' and the old fellow did his best to grin friendly-like. 'Can't you take a bit of a joke from one who has known you almost ever since you were born? I knew your father before you, and a right respectable rabbit he was.'

"'I suppose that was why you ate him!' I cried, suddenly remembering that it was this same old wretch who had eaten daddy. 'Most likely you tried to make out that he was a particular friend of yours, and that's why you did it.'

"'Was it your father I ate?' asked Grandfather Fox as if in surprise. 'Really you make me feel badly, Bunny, for I wouldn't hurt a single hair on the head of anybody belonging to you, and you ought to know that much by this time.'

"He didn't fool me a little bit, for I knew mighty well he would snap my nose off that very minute if I should be so foolish as to give him the chance.

"'Why don't you try to tell the truth for once in your life?' I asked, and before he could answer I heard somebody coming through the bushes, making as much noise as an elephant—that is, I reckon an elephant would raise just about such a racket, though I never saw one, but Mr. Crow told me all about 'em. He says he's seen more'n a million in his day, and I wouldn't wonder if that was the truth.

"It don't make any difference how much

noise was being made; it was time for me to show Grandfather Fox my heels—that I knew without being told more than once, so off I went, moving mighty softly, for I didn't count on letting Mr. Man get his hands on me till after I'd had the pleasure of seeing that old fox's skin nailed on the side of the barn, and even then it's safe to say I'd keep my weather eye lifting pretty lively for danger, on account of Sonny Bunny if nothing more.

"After getting so far away that it didn't seem as if there could be any danger, I hid snug in a bush and waited. It wasn't many minutes before I heard the noise of a gun, and then I said that the end of Grandfather Fox was come; but I couldn't seem to make up my mind to go home and tell Mrs. Bunny the good news till I'd seen his skin on the barn, and we knew there wasn't the least bit of a chance he could come to life, so off I went limperty, limperty, limp, not going so fast but that I'd be sure to hear if any of the farm people were nosing about, when whom should I come plump up against but the president himself, hiding among the leaves as if he'd joined the Fur section of the club.

"'What in the name of goodness are you doing down here on the ground, Mr. Crow?' I asked, and you'd better believe I was surprised.

"'Didn't you ever hear of a bird's scratching around for something to eat, Mr. Rabbit?' he asked, cocking one eye up at me in the queerest kind of way.

"'But you were regularly hiding, Mr. Crow!' I cried, and do you know, that mixed him up so much that if there hadn't been feathers on his head I really believe you could have seen that he was blushing.

"'Well, to tell the truth, I was watching Mr. Man,' he said after a while, and that made me more surprised than ever, so I asked:

"'Why mightn't you do that better in a tree, sir? If I could fly as you can, and wanted to see what was going on, you can wager all the doughnuts Mrs. Man ever fried that I'd be up high in the air, where it would be possible to see what was going on without stretching my neck out of shape.'

"'As a rule I should do the same thing, Mr. Bunny; but, although I'm really ashamed to admit it, this is one of the days when I'm afraid of Mr. Man's gun. Now I wouldn't have you

tell that to any living creature; but somehow, the sight of his gun sent the cold chills down every feather on my body. He's out for business this afternoon, and when I came across him he was carrying Bobby Coon by the tail, which shows he's ready to kill anything and everything that comes his way.'

"'Poor Mr. Coon!' I cried, and I felt mighty sorry, for Bobby and I had always been good friends, though I must admit that he has some habits of which I don't approve. 'Do you know how he happened to play in such hard luck, Mr. Crow?'

"'I didn't see the murder done; it was all finished when I flew just over Mr. Man's head, not knowing he was so near, because at the time my mind was roaming across the seas where I've spent so many happy days! He fired at me quicker than you could wag your ear, and I heard the shot whistling about my head until I got real nervous. Do you happen to know what he was up to a few minutes ago?'

"Then I told the president all that had happened from the time Grandfather Fox met me and he said, when I had finished the story:

"'I've always claimed, Bunny, that you're

not as big a fool as you look, and you can prove it by going straight home instead of hanging around here, where you're in danger, simply for the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Fox's skin nailed up on the barn. Besides, it'll take Mr. Man a good hour to do the job as it should be done.'

"'Why don't you take your own advice, Mr. Crow?' I asked, and he replied with a flirt of his tail:

"'That's just what I'm about to do, Mr. Bunny. I only stopped here to see what Mr. Man was going to do with poor Bobby Coon, but there's no more sense in my doing that than there is for you to wait for the funeral of Grandfather Fox. I'm right glad he's dead, even though he never killed any of my relatives; but if I had a young family where a fox could get at them I shouldn't feel easy in mind a single minute when he was around, although I've heard said that the crows are not what you might call real good eating.'

"Then Mr. Crow stepped out into the open, where he could have a fair chance to raise his wings and off he sailed without a single 'caw,' which shows how nervous he really was.

"Well, I began to turn about, smelling the

safest way home, for what Mr. Crow had said gave me the idea that perhaps I was foolish to spend my time so near the farm, especially when I could come before anybody was stirring next morning to see Grandfather Fox's skin, and just at the very minute I had hunched myself to jump who should come ambling along but Bobby Coon.

"You can't think what a start it gave me to see him after the president of our club had said he was dead! If he hadn't called in a way that would have been very unnatural for a dead coon it isn't certain I'd stayed to meet him. I was afraid it was nothing but his ghost I saw.

"'What is scaring you, Bunny? Don't you know me?'

"'Mr. Crow just told me you were dead; that he had seen Mr. Man carrying you home by the tail,' I said as soon as I could gather my wits and much to my surprise Bobby said, as if it was something that happened to him regularly:

"'That's just what Mr. Man was doing, Bunny, and I reckon he thought I was dead, all right. I'll tell you how it happened: I was asleep on a big branch that happened to grow near the ground, never dreaming there could be

any danger, because I was in the very middle of the big woods, when Mr. Man came along and at the very moment I awakened he hit me a clip with the end of his gun. I had sense enough to understand that there wasn't any chance to get away then, and instead of trying to run I fell plump on the ground, lying there as if the breath had been entirely knocked out of my body, which came near being the truth on account of the fall—the clip he gave me wouldn't have killed a flea. Well, for all Mr. Man is so big he's considerable of a fool and without stopping to see if I were really dead he picked me up by the tail, walking off as if he had done something very brave.'

"Bobby stopped talking then, as if he had told the whole of his story, but I asked:

"'Did you wiggle out of his hands?'

"'There was no chance to do anything like that, Bunny, for he had wound my tail around two of his fingers till I thought certain he'd pull it out by the roots; but I had to bear the pain without grinning, and I hung wabbly-like, as a dead coon would, till we came to where Grandfather Fox was caught in a trap and then Mr. Man let out a yell as if he had just found a long-

lost brother. Coons didn't amount to very much just then, when there was a fox skin to be taken that would bring in ten dollars or more, and down I was dropped so that Mr. Man could gather in the fur. I waited till I saw he had got well started at the work, and then off I sneaked. If it hadn't been for falling out of the tree, and having my tail twisted in such an ungentlemanly manner, I'd be as good as new. The wood folk can talk about never catching a weasel asleep; but I tell you it's a pretty cold day when any of the people from the farm can get the best of Brother Coon, unless they shoot him down before he's had a chance to show them some of his tricks.'

"Then Bobby chuckled and grinned as if he had done something wonderfully smart, and I'm not saying that he didn't; but I wanted him to know that if it hadn't been for my chucking Grandfather Fox into the trap he might not have come off so easy, and began to tell the story, beginning at the very first so's he'd know that some folks in the big woods were just as smart as the Coon family.

"I hadn't got into the thrilling part of it when suddenly I heard the sound of somebody's

coming through the bushes, and before I could open my mouth to yell, who should show himself but that miserable dog Towser! Frightened! I was so scared that for five seconds I never raised a paw, and then, just as Bobby was ambling away at the best speed he could make, I came to myself.

"Oh me! oh my! how I did run! Instead of following Bobby, as I hoped Towser would, although I never had any grudge against a coon, what should that beast of a dog do but take after me, and I was so mixed up that I didn't know which way to turn; but kept my nose pointed in the same direction it was when I started."

Bunny ceased speaking very suddenly, sitting there motionless, gazing at the ferns which were being swayed to and fro by the gentle breeze, and it seemed best to wait until he was in the mood to continue, for it was only natural that his thoughts should be unpleasant as he contemplated the treachery of Towser in thus taking by surprise himself and Bobby Coon.

CHAPTER XI

TOWSER AND THE SENATOR

Mr. Bunny seemed to have forgotten that he was telling a story, and continued to gaze at the waving ferns as if his thoughts were very far away, until it appeared absolutely necessary to ask whether Mr. Towser succeeded in making very great trouble for him.

"Oh, it didn't amount to anything much," he said with a chuckle as of satisfaction, pulling himself up with a start such as he might have given at the moment he made the unpleasant discovery that Mr. Towser was on his track. "Of course it wasn't very great fun for me to run for my life at a time when I was scared nearly to death; but before the thing was ended I had a heap of fun. Say, what do you think of the Senator, anyway?

"Don't you know him? Of course you know Senator Bear! We call him the Senator because he doesn't amount to half as much as he thinks he does, and goes around pushing his chest out

as if he were the most dangerous thing in the big woods, when all of us at the club know that he's only a big bunch of fur that doesn't dare to make any kind of fight, large as he is, unless Mr. Man gets him in a corner where it's a case of putting in the big licks to save his own skin. I do think a bear is about the most useless creature we have among us; he spends the whole winter long sleeping, and when he finally comes out of his den all he does is to go pottering around stealing honey from the bees, or watching for a chance to get hold of what some smaller fellow has gathered in.

"Mr. Crow says there are bears who really do amount to something—big, big fellows who wouldn't think anything of making one bite of a boy like Tommy Man, and who are the very worst kind of fighters; but we don't have any such in these woods. Why, do you know, there have been lots of times when I've really felt ashamed for the Senator because of his showing himself to be such a coward! Bobby Coon has thrown it in my face more than once that I'm the most scared thing to be found in the big woods, but I've seen the Senator run many a time at the littlest kind of noise when I'd held

my ground, at least, until I'd found out what really was the matter.

"You can't make out why I should be talking about Senator Bear when I'd started to tell about Mr. Towser's chasing me, eh? Well, it's because the Senator got mixed up with Mr. Towser and me a good bit before that chase came to an end. I suppose you want me to go back and tell about it in what Mr. Crow would call a 'proper manner,'—he's mighty particular about the way he tells a story, and always kicks up a terrible fuss if one of us so much as wags an ear when he's holding forth with one of his long-winded yarns.

"Let me see, I'd got to where Mr. Towser took after me, without paying any attention to Bobby Coon, and I was making my legs move the best I knew how, being all out of breath at the beginning of the race because of having started so suddenly. Well, I kept my nose pointed straight ahead, and if I'd run far in that direction I'd brought up in the swamp where I'd found more water than dry land, though I didn't think of anything like that at the time.

"Mr. Towser made certain he'd got me that time and once, when I looked back over my

shoulder, I saw that he was laughing. Now, do you know that helped me to put in the big licks more than anything else could have done? I folded my ears back so's they wouldn't hold the wind, and straightened myself out till I wasn't much thicker than a streak of daylight, jumping through the bushes whenever I saw a chance, so's Mr. Towser would be forced to go a good ways round, and before many minutes went by I had all my wits about me.

"I don't want to say anything that may sound like bragging, but it's a fact that when I get right down to business in the woods there aren't many members of the club who can come anywhere near me for speed—there's no telling how fast I can run when it gets right down to a pinch, and I was needing all my feet just then, for Mr. Towser isn't anybody's fool when it comes to a race, owing to his legs being so long.

"Well, as I was saying, I went through every bush that stood in the way and had just made a leap that beat anything ever done by a member of my family when what do you think? I came within half an inch of jumping down the throat of Senator Bear, who was lying on the dry moss in the sun, enjoying himself. Of course, he

came up on his feet like a steel spring when I flew past him; but he was too clumsy to do me any mischief and then I pulled up mighty short, for I knew there'd be quite a surprise party when Mr. Towser came along.

"I dodged into a big bed of ferns, for it stood to reason that my race had been called off on account of general conditions, and there I waited, stuffing my paws into my mouth so's I shouldn't roar right out loud, for I was laughing till it really seemed as if there was danger I'd burst. The Senator was standing with his mouth half open, wondering if it were actually a rabbit or only a little bit of sunlight that had given him such a start and then Towser came around the edge of the bushes full tilt, but pulling himself in mighty quick when he saw what he was up against.

"I saw the Senator's ears twitch, and knew he wanted to run; but there wasn't any time to get headway on, so he had to stop and do the best he knew how. Mr. Towser didn't claim to be any bear dog, and I reckon he'd have given the biggest bone he ever saw to have been out of the scrape without actually running away. There the two stood, one afraid and the other

scared, but both knowing there wasn't any chance of keeping the peace without owning right up to being cowards. I'll bet six of Mr. Man's biggest carrots that if I'd gone right out and coaxed them not to fight they'd thanked me with tears in their eyes for helping them out of a bad hole.

"The Senator came up on his hind legs, waving his fore paws in the air as if all he wanted was to make fur fly, and Mr. Towser growled in a way that would make your blood run cold; but neither of them moved out of his tracks. I was looking over the tops of the ferns, wondering who'd make the first move when suddenly somebody came up against me so strong that I was nearly knocked over, and a great deal more scared than I'd be willing to admit. Who do you think it was? Why, nobody but Bobby Coon, and I felt like pulling his tail real hard because he'd given me such a scare. Most likely I would have done it, for I'm awfully reckless when I'm angry, if it hadn't been that I wanted to keep my eyes on the Senator and Mr. Towser.

"Well, you know how foolish Bobby Coon can be without trying very hard, and instead of waiting to find out how the two would fix things,

he whispered to me: 'Just hold your breath a minute and see me give those two great ninnies the scare of their lives!' Then, before I could say a word to stop him, he scratched around among the leaves at a furious rate, singing out as if he were just regularly thirsting for somebody's blood: 'Let me at 'em! I'm needing just about that much meat!'

"It was mean of Bobby to break the meeting up; but even though I was furious with him I couldn't help laughing till my sides really ached. Oh, dear! how those stupid things did run at the first word that foolish coon spoke! They were in such a hurry to get away that they tumbled over each other, and before you could say 'Jack Robinson,' provided you'd wanted to say it, there was nothing to be seen but their hind feet as they clipped it through the bushes!

"I gave Bobby a real serious scolding for breaking up the fun so soon, for I had been aching to see how much of a fight they would have made and, besides, I had the least little bit of a hope that the Senator might have done up Mr. Towser, for there are times when that dog makes the lives of us club members a burden with sticking his nose in where it doesn't belong.

"LET ME AT 'EM"

"If you could have seen Bobby Coon capering around after the Senator and Mr. Towser ran away from each other you'd thought he had done the whole trick. He threw out his chest as if he were the biggest thing in the woods, and began telling about what the Coon family had done in days past, till I got provoked and said right sharply:

"'Any one to hear you talk would think you dare do almost anything.'

"'I'd like to know what you can scare up that I don't dare do,' he cried, swinging his tail till the dry leaves flew around his head like Mrs. Man's bonnet.

"'Nobody could hire you to walk around Mr. Man's barn three times,' I said, and the words hadn't much more than left my mouth before I was sorry that I spoke, for I surely didn't want Bobby to come to any harm, and after the trick he had played on Mr. Man it would be all his life was worth to go near the farm buildings, because even if it could be done without his being seen by some of the people there Mr. Towser would be certain to smell him out.

"'I'd go round the miserable old house a dozen times and never turn a hair!' he cried,

trying to speak mighty brave, but I could see that he wasn't hankering for any such job, so I said soothing-like:

"'I was only fooling with you, Bobby. Both you and I know there isn't a member of the club who'd dare to do such a trick as that, especially just now, when Mr. Towser is feeling mighty sore over his meeting with the Senator.'

"I truly believe that Bobby thought I was scared nearly out of my wits by the idea of such a thing and that made him bristle up worse than ever, so I'd think he was terribly brave.

"'I dare go all over this farm this very night!' he cried as bold as a lion. 'And if Mr. Towser tries to be funny with me, he'll wish he never had been born, for I won't stand any nonsense from that dog, and I wouldn't if he were as big as seven of the elephants Mr. Crow tells about.'

"'Now you're talking through your hat,' I said, and to tell the truth I was trembling all over at the thought of going where Mr. Towser could get the best of me without more than half trying.

"'You shall see whether I am or not!' he cried, washing his face and smoothing his fur as if getting ready to go to a coon party. 'I'll ramble

all over the place as soon as it is dark, and if you've got the spunk of a flea you'll come to see me fool Mr. Man's folks.'

"I was so frightened at the idea of his being so foolhardy that I'd have gone right down on my knees to beg that he stop his nonsense, but just then who should come up but his cousin, Jimmy Hedgehog, and of course he had to know what we'd been talking about.

"I wanted to keep the whole thing a secret, so Bobby's folks shouldn't know what a spectacle he'd been making of himself, but that didn't satisfy the foolish fellow, and he must needs up and tell Jimmy all we'd said.

"Now if you know Jimmy Hedgehog a little bit, you know he's forever trying to stir up other people so that there'll be a row, and then if there's the least bit of a chance that he may get hurt, he rolls himself up into a little ball, with all his quills sticking straight out, when even Butcher Weasel wouldn't dare to touch him. Of course it didn't take him many seconds to understand that here was the best kind of chance for getting poor Bobby into a scrape, and he said, as if he thought I was to blame for having said anything against the foolish scheme:

"'Bobby isn't the coward you are, Bunny Rabbit, and if he says he'll have fun with Mr. Towser to-night, he means it. I'd like to see one of the Coon family go back on his word. If he goes, you and I will go with him, and then we can tell all the club members how brave he is.'

"Of course this was the kind of talk to make Bobby stick to his word, though he must have begun to understand by that time how foolish he was, and if you'll believe me, I didn't dare to say straight up and down that I wouldn't have anything to do with the silly business, for fear Jimmy would be forever telling at the club that I was the worst kind of coward to be found in the big woods—which I'm free to admit privately is the fact."

Once more Mr. Bunny paused in his story-telling to gaze pensively at the ferns, which were now bending the tips of their plumes beneath the heat of the sun, and it seemed no more than right that he should have ample time in which to reflect upon Bobby Coon's folly and his own timidity.

CHAPTER XII

FOLLY, NOT BRAVERY

THERE was no necessity of reminding Mr. Bunny Rabbit that he had been telling a story, for, after gazing pensively at the ferns a few seconds, he continued meditatively, as if giving words to his thoughts rather than speaking to any one:

"Never again, not if I live to be as old as an elephant, and Mr. Crow declares that elephants stay and stay alive till the hills grow to be mountains, will I ever be so foolish as to take part in any silly thing simply because of being afraid to say that I don't dare stick my nose in where it doesn't belong. A fellow like me, who is moving about through the big woods a good deal, and who keeps his ears and eyes wide open, is certain to learn a good many things in the course of his life, and since Bobby Coon led me on that terrible chase, I have come to understand that it is folly, not bravery, to venture into danger simply for the sake of trying to

prove that a fellow isn't afraid, when way down in his heart he knows that he is scared nearly out of his wits.

"All the members of the club say I'm the biggest coward to be found anywhere around, and suppose I am? Isn't it better to let the matter go at that than for me to prove myself foolish as well by doing what I know I've got no business to do? Of course it is; but I wasn't as wise when Bobby Coon declared he'd ramble all over Mr. Man's farm, while all of us knew that Dog Towser would be on watch as soon as the sun went down, and instead of saying that I wouldn't have anything to do with such folly, I made it look as if I were aching to be just as foolish as he was showing himself to be.

"I'm thinking that if Jimmy Hedgehog had minded his own business, poor Bobby would have come to realize that the farm wasn't any place for him, especially after he'd played such a trick on Mr. Man; but Jimmy must needs keep on telling me how brave Bobby was, and making the talk only to keep the poor fellow up to what he'd said he'd do. Do you know, that silly coon strutted around, throwing his chest 'way out, and telling what he'd do if Mr.

Towser interfered with him, when we all know that he couldn't go up against one of that dog's paws. Once I got him away from Jimmy, and tried to show him that he would still be running the biggest kind of chances even if he contrived to sneak around the place without Mr. Towser's smelling him; but he had the bravery business on his mind and it was a clear waste of breath to say anything.

"I can tell you that I was trembling all over mighty bad when the sun went down; but yet I didn't dare go back home as I ought to have done, for fear Jimmy and Bobby would tell at the club that I'd shown myself a coward, so I waited with those two till it was real dark, and then Jimmy said, bristling up his quills to make himself look like the fiercest thing on feet:

"'Now's your time, Bobby. Get on to your job, and show the wood folks that you've got the good old Coon blood in your veins!'

"Just for a minute I hoped Bobby would back out, for he sniffed in the wind quite a spell until Jimmy, beginning to fear that he wasn't going to have the fun he'd laid out for himself, began to laugh in a mighty disagreeable way as he said:

"'If I'd thought you were only bragging when you told about rambling over the farm, I wouldn't have wasted my time around here.'

"'You didn't get any brag from me,' poor Bobby said, his voice trembling as if he wanted to cry. 'I'm going to do just as I allowed, and you two fellows want to follow me close, so's to make certain I wipe up the earth with Mr. Towser, if he has the nerve to show himself where I am.'

"Did you ever hear anything so foolish as that? A coon allowing that he could get away with a dog like Mr. Towser! I had to follow when Bobby started; but I made out that I couldn't travel very fast owing to my left hind foot's being sore, and you'd better believe that I didn't try very hard to get a front place in the procession, though I could have run all around Bobby and Jimmy if I'd tried. You can set it down under your collar that I took good care to smell my way along mighty cautious, 'cause I wasn't aching to come up against anything that outclassed me.

"Well, Bobby kept straight on, heading for Mr. Man's barn, and I knew enough about the lay of the land to see that he'd strike the farm

pretty near to where Mr. Towser's house stood, so my feet got sorer and sorer till, before we were very far from the bushes, it was about as much as I could do to hop. Jimmy kept egging Bobby on, and this took up his attention so much that he didn't give any heed to me for quite a spell, when I heard him whispering:

"'Come on, Bunny; do you want to miss all the fun?'

"It was on my tongue's end to tell him that all the fun we'd be likely to have that night would be what we might get out of seeing poor Bobby killed; but I thought we'd soon be having trouble enough without my trying to stir up any more just then, so I said, talking as if it were all I could do to keep from crying:

"'If your tongue was aching same as my foot is, you couldn't even yip.'

"Then I hung back a little more, and it seemed as if poor Bobby must have run ahead considerably faster, for in another minute I heard Mr. Towser growling furiously, and at the same time came a squeak which told for a certainty that Bobby Coon had come to an end of his rambling. That dog must have got the scent of us while we were a long distance away,

and laid low till all he had to do was snap his teeth together on Bobby's back.

"There was no chance for Bobby to play the same trick that had fooled Mr. Man, for I'm allowing he didn't have time to do more than let out the squeak we'd heard before he was really and truly dead. He had shown Jimmy and me that he dared to ramble around the farm; but how much had he gained by it? Why, there isn't a member of the club who doesn't say that he deserved to be killed for making such a simpleton of himself, though according to my idea, Jimmy Hedgehog is the one who ought to have got the worst of that mix-up.

"Well, the killing of poor Bobby didn't satisfy Mr. Towser. He had the scent of us, and after giving what was left of Bobby a toss in the air to make certain there was no life left in any of the pieces, he came for us at full tilt, thinking to make a clean job of the party. You can put it down as a fact that my left hind foot got well mighty quick just then, and without waiting to see how Jimmy was getting along, I lit out, knowing I was up against the race of my life.

"As nearly as I can make out, Mr. Towser

must have come afoul of Jimmy when he first started for me, and you can put it down in your hat that that hedgehog knew how to take care of himself, even if he did egg others into danger, so I suppose that he rolled himself into a ball with all his quills sticking straight up. Then you can guess that the dog didn't do much smelling of that prickly bunch, for he's nobody's fool; but, after looking at it a minute, turned all his attention to me.

"Now it's a fact that Jimmy wouldn't do me a good turn if he had the chance; but this time he surely saved my life by being just where he was, for if Mr. Towser hadn't stopped he'd surely caught me on the meadow where there isn't the least little bit of a chance to dodge. Even as it was, I had to move my feet mighty fast in order to keep ahead of him, and when we came to the edge of the woods I was leading by four or five lengths, with the odds big in my favor because of the bushes. But I had to keep on moving all the time, just the same, and was precious near being winded when, slaperty, bang! I fell into a hole, nearly scraping the skin from one ear as I struck the bottom.

"You'd thought that I'd naturally have

chuckled mightily at giving Mr. Towser the slip so neatly; but it's a fact that I felt really ashamed, for it did seem ridiculous that one of my family would fall into a hole while running. Where was I? Well, if you'll believe it, I'd struck Grandfather Fox's hole, and he wasn't at home on account of having his hide nailed up on Mr. Man's barn, so there I was all by my lonesome, with Mr. Towser scratching gravel at a great rate; but I knew he could wear his claws way down to the flesh before getting in, for Grandfather Fox knew how to dig a house that would protect him from dogs.

"I didn't have to wait so very long before Mr. Towser got tired of scratching, and then I crept out, counting on going straight home, for it stood to reason that Mrs. Bunny and Sonny Bunny would be worried because I'd been away so long; but before I'd taken half a dozen hops whom should I hear calling me but Cheeko's oldest boy.

"'You're to go straight up to the club, Mr. Rabbit,' he said when I stopped short to look over my left shoulder for luck. 'Mr. Crow has called a meeting right away, and all the members of both sections are expected to be on hand.

Bobby Coon is dead, and old Mr. Slowly Turtle is ready to swear that he heard Jimmy Hedgehog stumping the poor fellow to tackle Mr. Towser.'

"When I got to the big oak it seemed as if every member of the club was waiting for me, and I felt really bashful when the president croaked:

"'Here comes Mr. Rabbit, and now we shall be able to get at the truth of the matter, for even though he hasn't very much courage, he will always tell the truth.'

"Just think of that! It was the same as being called a coward after all I'd done to prevent it, and if I'd behaved myself in the first place, poor Bobby might have been alive at that very minute! Yes, Jimmy Hedgehog was there, and you could see that he was feeling mighty grouchy, for he'd rolled himself into a ball, with his quills sticking out in every direction. I could just see the tip of his nose and one eye, and by the way he looked at me I knew he was practically threatening to serve me out if I should say anything he didn't like.

"Mr. Crow didn't give me any chance to look around after he saw me eyeing Jimmy, for he

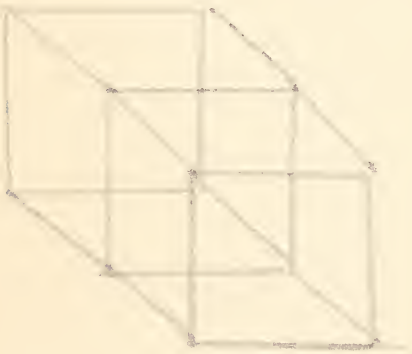
called me up to the foot of the tree, and all hands crowded near, as if I were the fellow who was having a trial, instead of being only a witness.

" ' It has been reported to me as the president of this club that you heard young Hedgehog urging Bobby Coon to trifle with Mr. Towser, by doing which he lost his life. You are accused of being in Mr. Coon's company at the time, and those who saw you claim that you did not even so much as raise your voice against the advice which Jimmy Hedgehog was giving his cousin. We demand from you a straightforward account of the whole matter, for, as members of the Fur and Feather Club, it is our duty to learn if one member has acted toward another member in an unbrotherly fashion.'

" You might have knocked me down with a feather by the time Mr. Crow finished his long-winded speech. I wasn't so blind but that I could see Jimmy wasn't the only one who would get it warm, and yet I give you my solemn word I hadn't the slightest idea of telling anything but the honest truth. I got up on my hind legs to answer the president, when Mr. Jay shouted, excitedly :

"'Look out for your skins! Here comes that disreputable Professor Hawk!'"

Mr. Bunny had no more than ceased speaking as if to take a long breath, when the Professor sailed slowly by, and the story-teller watched curiously until he had disappeared from view in the distance.



CHAPTER XIII

DISCIPLINING JIMMY

"I JUST wish I could wring that old fellow's neck!" Mr. Bunny cried angrily as he shook one paw in the direction of Professor Hawk, who was slowly circling around with his eyes apparently fixed on Mr. Rabbit. "'Squire Owl, the old one as well as the young one, is about as bad a bird as we members of the Fur section care to meet; but yet I think that old pirate is worse than all the Owl family put together, for the 'Squire's folks can't do much mischief except in the night, and the Hawk gang are at it all the time.

"Of course I couldn't wring his neck even if I got a good hold with all four paws, because he can give a fellow a terrible drubbing with his wings; but if I were strong enough, and could bite as Butcher Weasel can, I'd give him all he wanted, even if I had to spend my time, night and day, for a week in order to do it. More than twenty times I've torn my coat mighty

badly through jumping into a thorn bush to get out of that fellow's way, and such sort of business gets tiresome after a while.

"The worst part of Professor Hawk, so far as we members of the Fur section are concerned, is that his eyes are so sharp. He can sail around in the sky so high up that a fellow can't see him, and yet keep a mighty good watch on all that takes place beneath him! Fly! He can beat any bird I know of at that way of getting around, and when he drops down for a young rabbit or a squirrel, the chances are that it's good-bye then.

"Of course it doesn't do any good for me to sit here and scold about the Professor; he'll keep on at his murderous business just as long as there are animals in the big woods for him to eat, so I'll get on with the story I was trying to tell when he stuck his beak in where it didn't belong. Just keep your eye out for the old fellow, for it wouldn't bother him a bit to pick me off this log with you sitting close by, and call it a good joke.

"Let me see—I'd come to where the club meeting was broken up by the Professor, and I'd gone into a thorn bush head first. Well, you

can set it down as a fact that I wasn't in any hurry about coming out from cover till the word had been given that he had gone, and even then I took good care to have a sharp look around before showing even so much as the end of my nose. I was the last one out, and when I hopped through the bushes Jimmy Hedgehog set up a great shout about my being the biggest coward of the crowd. What was the use of answering him back? It wasn't because of being so terribly brave that he stayed out in the open while all the other members of the club were hunting for cover; but he knew that so long as he was rolled into a ball, with his quills sticking out in every direction, the Professor wouldn't dare to meddle with him.

"I'm thinking one reason why he made so much noise about my being a coward was that he hoped to make the others forget they had met to overhaul him for egging poor Bobby on to his death. If that was the scheme in his mind, it didn't work, for in less than half a minute after I showed myself, Mr. Crow got right down to business, and it wasn't so very long before all hands knew the story as well as I did. Mr. Blue Jay perched himself on the

very top of the oak tree, where he could sound the alarm in case the Professor showed himself again, and Cheeko's oldest child was stationed in a bush at the edge of the clearing to give warning if Butcher Weasel came sneaking along, so we weren't afraid of being taken by surprise.

"Some of the animals say that Mr. Crow doesn't know as much as he tries to make out; but he was sharp enough to get in all the facts concerning the murder of poor Bobby, and when the matter was ended every member of the club knew just who was to blame for what had happened over on the farm. More than once while I was answering the question the president asked, Jimmy wrinkled up his nose at me, as much as to say that he would serve me out for telling tales on him; but I couldn't help myself, could I? They called me a coward, and perhaps there's some truth in what they say, but I'll never give one of them the right to say I'm a liar and that's what could have been said if I hadn't told the story just as it was.

"Well, after the trial was over, Mr. Crow hopped to the very tiptoppest branch of the tree and gave out what I suppose you'd call the sentence. He said that Jimmy Hedgehog wasn't

to be considered a member of the club till he'd shown plainly and positively that he was sorry because he had urged Bobby to go where Mr. Towser was, and that while he was deprived of the club privileges, no member would be allowed so much as to speak to him. More than that, he wasn't to put his paw anywhere near the big oak. It was that part of it which seemed to make Jimmy more angry than anything else, and he cried out, as he actually shook his fist at the president:

"'I'd like to know how you can stop me from coming near this blooming old tree in case I take a notion to hover round? I'll have you know, Jim Crow, that you don't dare to lay the weight of your wings on me, 'less you want to be filled so full of quills that you'd have to draw your breath crosswise! Do you think I won't come here if I feel like it? You make me tired with your club talk, and the sooner you take my name off the list the better I'll be pleased!'

"Then Jimmy shook himself till his quills rattled, and looked around to see if any members of the Fur section were going to call him to account for what he had said; but I noticed that he was all ready to roll himself into a ball

at the first move that might be made toward him. Of course, it mixed us all up to have such talk as that right in meeting; but there wasn't any use in making a row with a fellow you couldn't hit on account of his quills, so no one said anything, though I noticed that Mr. Crow hopped about mighty lively, which showed how angry he was.

"Jimmy swelled around a few minutes, shaking himself every once in a while as if he were the only thing of any account in the big woods, and then off he strutted, looking over his shoulder now and then to learn if any one had the nerve to follow him. You could have heard a nut drop just so long as he was in sight; but when it was certain he couldn't hear what was said all hands began to talk about what ought to be done with a fellow who had made himself so disagreeable.

"'Leave him to me,' Mr. Crow said in his very youngest voice as soon as it was possible to make himself heard. 'I want you to understand that I'm not any bump on a log, and before I'm through with Jimmy Hedgehog he'll wish he'd kept his tongue between his teeth. I'm the president of this club, and there isn't

any ordinary-sized member of the Fur section who can bulldoze me.'

"It almost frightened me to hear the president speak in that way, for, while I haven't any love for Jimmy, it made me feel rather bad to think how tough it would be for him when Mr. Crow started out on his trail. Every one of the wood folks seemed to think that something more than suspending him from the club should be done to the member who had spoken out in meeting as Jimmy had, and while they were telling Mr. Crow what he ought to do I slipped off, for I knew that Mrs. Bunny was probably getting a bit angry because I'd been away from home so long.

"Now do you know, it never came into my head that Jimmy Hedgehog would try to do me a bad turn because I had told what he said to poor Bobby. I had to answer the questions which the president asked, or I'd sure been brought up with a round turn, and I never said a word more than just enough to satisfy Mr. Crow; but for all that it seems Jimmy had it in for me good and hot.

"I hopped along home with my ears well back over my shoulders so I could hear if

anybody was after me, and was thinking what a nice time I'd have with some of Mr. Man's carrots that I'd brought in the day before, when what should I stumble over but a place on the moss which looked as if there'd been mischief of some kind done there lately. I had an idea I could smell blood ever so faintly, but even then I didn't suspect anything was wrong at home till I crept in through the hallway, and there was poor little Sonny Bunny all curled up as if he'd been tied in a knot, while his mother was washing the blood spots off his coat.

"'What's the matter?' I asked, feeling as faint as ever a rabbit could, and Mrs. Bunny said, speaking as if it were all my fault:

"'It's something to do with that precious club of yours, and if you don't take yourself out of it this very day Sonny Bunny and I'll leave this hole for good and all!'

"Mrs. Bunny never did like the idea of my joining the club; but she hadn't come out quite so strong before, and it staggered me so much that, just for the moment, I forgot that my poor little Sonny seemed to be in trouble. It was quite a spell before I could coax her to tell what had happened, and when she did speak

I found out how mean a sneak Jimmy Hedgehog could be without trying very hard.

"It seems that poor Sonny was lying on the moss sunning himself, at the very place where I fancied it was possible to smell blood, when along came Jimmy. Of course, Sonny stayed where he was, never thinking one of the Hedgehog family would do him any harm, and without saying a word Jimmy lay down on the poor little fellow, rolling over on him as many as six times. There's no need for me to say that my dear little rabbit looked, when Jimmy got up, a good deal like one of Mrs. Man's pincushions, for quills were sticking out all over him.

"'You can tell your father that that's what he gets for tattling about me,' Jimmy said in a terribly ugly voice, 'and if he doesn't mind his business from now on I'll come and fix your mother the same way!'

"Poor Sonny was so frightened and hurt that he couldn't say a word, and there he lay, not daring to move because every time he wiggled the least little bit the quills would stick into him worse than ever, till his mother found him. She had just finished pulling out the quills

when I came in, and, of course, felt a good deal excited; wouldn't even let me touch Sonny, but declared that until I'd left the club for good and all I couldn't come where she or the children were.

"It wasn't the least little use for me to promise that I'd take my name off the list of members next morning; she insisted that I do it that very same minute, and, if you'll believe me, nearly drove me out of my own home, threatening to pour hot water on me if I didn't notify the president right away that I was through with joining clubs.

"When Mrs. Bunny gets really mad there isn't any sense in trying to argue with her, for she won't listen, and, seeing that I was driven out of the hole, there was nothing left but to do as she had said. You can't think how bad I felt about being obliged to do it, for I knew all the members would laugh at me, or say I didn't dare to stand up for my rights; but there wasn't any other way out of the scrape, as I figured it, so off I went, hopping mighty slow, and trying to think up what I could say to make the other fellows believe I'd got tired of going to the club meetings.

"I suppose because I was so mixed up in my mind I didn't look after myself as I would have done at almost any other time, and all of a sudden there was one of Grandfather Fox's grandchildren standing right in front of me, so near that I could have touched him with my paw! Now you'd better believe I was frightened, and I had good reason to be, for if he made one snap I was a gone rabbit, as I couldn't make the first jump without his nabbing me!

"He licked his chops, thinking, I suppose, that a bit of fresh rabbit would taste mighty good, and I couldn't help saying to myself that I was the freshest thing in the big woods, else I'd have had better sense than to have run straight into that impudent young fox as I had. He was a member of the family with which I wasn't very well acquainted, but when I understood by the swinging of his tail that he was getting ready to pounce on me I said, as if he were the best friend I ever had in the world:

"'Good afternoon, Mr. Fox. Your grandfather was an old acquaintance of mine, and I'm mighty glad to meet a grandson of his who looks so much like him.'

"Mr. Fox grinned, but he never said a word,

and I made up my mind right off quick that there wouldn't be any need for me to tell Mr. Crow to take my name off the club list, for in two or three minutes more there wouldn't be enough left of me to talk about."

At this point Mr. Rabbit ceased speaking abruptly, moving his ears to and fro nervously as if he had heard something disagreeable, and common courtesy demanded that the silence should not be broken save by himself.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. CROW'S PLOT

WHILE one might have counted twenty Mr. Rabbit remained in a listening attitude, and then, shaking his ears with a gesture which was very like that of mental relief, said with a smile as he stroked his whiskers swaggeringly :

"Do you know, just for a minute I thought the smell of young Mr. Fox was in the air. When I got rid of that fellow's grandfather I said to Mrs. Bunny that a full half of all our troubles had disappeared out of the big woods, with the evidence of the good fortune nailed up on Mr. Man's barn ; but I had entirely forgotten that the old rascal left behind him a regular gang of children and grandchildren, and I truly believe they are the worst to be found anywhere in this world, to say nothing of their being able to run twice as fast as their grandfather ever could even in his best days.

"I wonder why it is that the Fox family have such a hankering for rabbit pie, stew, or even

plain rabbit? Of course, they don't turn up their noses at a good plump partridge, and they know how to catch him, too, when the snow is deep; but I verily believe there's nothing goes quite so near the right spot in a fox's stomach as rabbit meat. Mr. Crow says that years and years ago, when the mountains were only grown into little hills, Clote Scarpe, the Great Spirit who made all the birds and animals, used to walk around listening to any complaint his creatures might make. I wish he would come around the big woods now! You can set it down as a fact that I'd beg him to fix it so that the first taste of rabbit would make a fox so sick that he'd come pretty near turning himself inside out, and then there'd be a little peace for my family.

"No; it's as you say, Clote Scarpe doesn't pay very much attention to us wood folks now, and it wouldn't surprise me a little bit if it were all one of Mr. Crow's yarns—I mean about the Great Spirit's listening to our troubles, for if anything like that ever had happened, it seems as if some of my people would have fixed it for us long ago. Yet, if you'd listen to Mr. Turtle, he'd tell you that years and years ago, before even the

rocks had grown, one of his greatest, greatest grandfathers, who didn't have any hard shell on his back, went to Clote Scarpe and had himself fixed so that none of the animals could bite him, and that's the reason why he's got a house to live in this day that even Jimmy Hedgehog can't harm.

"Don't be afraid that I won't finish my story I began a while ago. Speaking of the Fox family brought my mind to what Mrs. Bunny and I have talked over many and many a time, and I couldn't seem to help telling you about it. Now I'll go on about the fix I found myself in when I was going up to the club to tell the president that I'd have to give over being a member because it was making so much trouble for me at home. And do you know, that very scrape with young Mr. Fox was what broke up our meetings at Crow's Corner? It's a fact, though perhaps the same thing might have happened in some other way.

"Well, there I was standing face to face with young Mr. Fox, and he grinning at me in a way that said just as plain as words could have done what a good time he'd have eating me. Goodness, I'm trembling even now to think of what

he might have done before I had a chance to wag my ear if he'd known that I was the one who led his grandfather into the trap where Mr. Man could get hold of him so easily! When he didn't even speak after I'd talked to him so sweetly the idea came into my head that perhaps I might jump right over his back and so get out of the hole in that way; but it seemed as if he must have known what was in my mind, for he said with another of his beastly grins:

"'Don't try to do anything like that, Bunny Rabbit, for I'm a good deal more spry with my feet than ever grandfather was, and I'd catch you on the fly.'

"'Perhaps you're making a mistake as to what I was thinking about,' I said innocent-like, as if I didn't have sense enough to go home when it rained. 'I was saying to myself that you had quite the most beautiful tail I ever saw on one of your family.'

"Do you know, that struck him just right, and for the life of him he couldn't help turning his head to look at it, though, between you and me, it wasn't anything extra in the way of a tail; except for the size, Cheeko had a better one —more bushy and with much finer hair. Young

Mr. Fox took all I said in sober earnest and began waving that fly-brush of his to and fro so he could see it the more plainly and then was come the time I'd been playing for!

"The very minute he turned his head I gave the jump of my life, and it was as many as ten feet straight in the air, beating the Rabbit record by more than five inches. I sailed right over a big alder bush, and when I came down on my feet, young Mr. Fox had just got it into his head that I'd played him a trick. Now you can set it down as a fact that I didn't linger around there any very great while!

"I was off like a runaway streak of lightning the very instant I had the ground under my paws, and, of course, young Mr. Fox started after me; but I had a good three yards the start of him, and to a rabbit who holds the record for running, as I do, that was a mighty long distance. Then again I knew all the crooks and turns in our part of the big woods, while Grandfather Fox's grandson wasn't very well acquainted in that part of the country.

"Before I'd much more than struck my gait I knew I could give him the slip whenever I wanted to, and it seemed as if it would do the

STRAIGHT IN THE AIR

foolish fellow a world of good to teach him a lesson that he wouldn't forget right away, so I set about doing it to the Queen's taste. First I took a turn over by the pond, where the ground was so wet in spots that he'd sink in two or three inches at every leap, while, by skimming along the edge, I was tiring him out, which was what I didn't want to do till he'd got it considerably harder than he had up to that time.

"Then I tore round by the head pine tree, where Senator Bear lives, thinking that perhaps the old fellow himself might like to take a hand in the game, but he wasn't at home. After that I hiked it up Hemlock Hill, where I could run under the fallen timber and through the thorn bushes, while he'd have to show what he was able to do in the way of jumping, or go a long bit around.

"That was the part of the race that broke his heart, and when I circled over the top, allowing I'd give him a sight of the club's meeting place, I saw him sitting down trying to pull a thorn out of his left hind foot. Then I laughed and cut capers till he started down the hill again on his way home, after which I went off hippety-hop, saying to myself that it would do poor

little Sonny Bunny a world of good when I told the story to him.

"Of course I had to go right past the big oak in order to get home, and when I was there the most sensible thing I could do was to stop and have a chat with President Crow, for I wanted to tell him how well I'd served out young Mr. Fox.

"Old Mr. Crow was roosting mighty low that day, talking with Bobby Coon's brother, and when I told him what had happened he laughed till the tears got all mixed up with feathers on his cheeks, for he had heard young Fox telling 'Squire Owl that he was going to make the Rabbit family look mighty sick as soon as he had time to attend to the matter.

"Well, after we'd had a good time over what I'd done and when Bobby's brother had gone away I up and told Mr. Crow that I had to leave the club that very day, else there'd never be any more peace at home for me. The news surprised him terribly, as I understood by the way he kept smoothing out his tail feathers, and it was quite a spell before he could seem to say anything, but when he did speak it was the kind of talk that counted.

"'We'll be sorry to lose you from the club, Bunny,' he said, 'for even though you don't cut any great figure in helping the business along we can always count on you to do the running about when the House Committee want to send out notices, or if it is necessary for me to call a special meeting. Of course I don't want to advise you to do anything which may make trouble at your home; but it's my solemn advice for you to leave your name on the rolls till I've had a chance to talk with Mrs. Bunny. Perhaps she'll look at it in a different light when I've shown her how much good you're getting from keeping company with the other wood folks.'

"Now, I had a pretty good idea that Mrs. Bunny would take a broom to the president, instead of listening to him, if he went to my home while Sonny Bunny was so sick and I told him as much, breaking it gently so he wouldn't get angry; but, bless you, he didn't seem to mind it. He's been around the world so much that he's got a mighty good idea of how things may be at a fellow's home when one of the children has been abused.

"'I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Bunny,' he said, ruffling the feathers on his neck as he always

does when he's got some big scheme in his mind, 'Jimmy Hedgehog is the one who's responsible for all the trouble we've been having, and if I can find Mr. Turtle at home I'll rig up a plan that'll make Mr. Hedgehog wish he'd never been quite so pert with the president of the Fur and Feather Club. I don't count on letting that prickly young chap run things his own way around Crow's Corner!'

"'What do you count on doing?' I asked, for I was dreadfully curious by the time he'd got through talking.

"'Leave it to me, Bunny Rabbit. I've been out of the shell too long to stand such nonsense from a hedgehog; but at the same time I don't count on letting you into one of my secrets till the plans are all laid. We'll go around by the way of your home, and there I'll tell Mrs. Bunny what you've said about leaving the club. That'll keep her quiet for a while, or, at least, calm her down so you and she can live in the same house a bit longer, and if my plan works as I think it will she'll be so tickled that you won't hear anything more about her wanting you to keep away from Crow's Corner.'

"Of course I let him have his own way, for,

being old, he's so headstrong that you can't stop him from doing what he's set his mind on, no matter how foolish it may be; but I wasn't much surprised, after we came to my home and I'd called Mrs. Bunny out of her hole, to hear her talk quite disrespectfully to him about the club, which she declared was nothing more nor less than an excuse for us animals and birds to idle our time away when we should be at home attending to household affairs.

"He didn't seem to lose his temper a little bit, even when she talked the most, but kept on trying to soothe her by saying that the only trouble we'd ever had in the big woods among ourselves had been caused by Jimmy Hedgehog, but we'd hear nothing more of that kind after his plan had been worked out.

"Mrs. Bunny smoothed down a little before he left, and when he flew off I went into the bedroom to see poor little Sonny Bunny, though I was just fairly dying to know what it was Mr. Crow counted on doing to Jimmy, and why it was necessary for him to see Mr. Turtle.

"Sonny Bunny was looking pretty bad when I went in; but he perked up a good bit after I told him how I'd served out young Mr. Fox,

and before a great while he began to play around just as ever, though he was mighty careful not to rub up against anything, on account of being so sore in the places where Jimmy's quills had stuck into him.

"It was the longest while before Mrs. Bunny would so much as listen to my going out again to see what Mr. Crow's trick might be; but after I'd talked so much about it that she began to grow a bit curious herself, she agreed that it would be all right if I didn't stay more than an hour, and took good care to keep away from the Fox family.

"Well, I kissed Sonny Bunny, who cried to go with me, as he might have done if only his mother had been willing, and then off I hopped, puzzling my brain to guess what part Mr. Turtle could have in Mr. Crow's plot."

CHAPTER XV

MR. TURTLE

"Now if you had known the president of the Fur and Feather Club as long as we wood folks have you'd believe that when he laid himself right out to do a thing, it would come pretty near to being finished 'way down to the ground," Mr. Bunny Rabbit said as he continued his story, after a pause no longer than might be necessary in which to draw a long breath. "Mr. Crow as well as said that we folks in the big woods wouldn't have any more trouble with Jimmy Hedgehog after he got through with him, and I counted that he'd come pretty near keeping his word.

"If he hadn't said that he couldn't work his plan without Mr. Turtle, I'd been perfectly willing to stay at home till he finished the job, whatever it might be; but when he talked as if old Slowly was the only one who could help him, I got agitated. Just think of it! Getting a fellow to help you who makes a two-days'

journey of it from the pond to the big oak! It twisted me terribly to figure out what Mr. Turtle could do to help the president, and I really had to leave home the very minute Mrs. Bunny was willing, to see how the thing was going to be worked.

"The first place I struck for was the big oak, and there was Mr. Crow roosting on the very tiptoppest branch, looking as if he'd been asleep for a month. He didn't pay the least little bit of attention when I spoke to him, and just for the minute I thought I'd best go back home without sticking my nose into any of the old fellow's plans; but if I did that there wouldn't be any rest for me the whole of that night, so off I hopped into the open, where he couldn't help seeing me if he lifted his head, and then I shouted:

"'Hi there! President Crow! Hello!'

"I must have made considerable noise toward the last, for suddenly the old bird raised his head with a jerk, as if he'd heard Butcher Weasel coming after him, and looked around as if frightened till he saw me. Then he shook himself so that the feathers on his neck ruffled up as if he were ready for a fight, and asked crossly:

"'Is that you, Mr. Rabbit?'

"Of course I told him it was I, as I stood right out there for all hands to see, and if it hadn't been for making trouble when it didn't seem to be necessary I'd have something to say about the president of such a club as ours asking questions when he knew full well what the answers were.

"'Why are you loitering around here? Why don't you go home and do up your chores before dark?' he croaked in a way that didn't please me a little bit, for I'm not the kind of rabbit that neglects his family, except, perhaps, when there's something important on hand for me to watch and I told him so plainly; but he croaked again:

"'I'm still wanting to know why you don't go home? There won't be any meeting of this club till nearly sunset, and perhaps not then, unless Jimmy Hedgehog gets into trouble.'

"'That's why I'm here, Mr. Crow,' I said quickly, getting excited again. 'I'm just regularly dying to know how old Slowly Turtle can do anything to help along the plan you said you'd worked out.'

"'Come around about sunset and perhaps

you'll see a thing or two,' he said, and then stuck his head under his wing as if he were nearly dead for want of sleep.

"There didn't seem to be any sense in hanging around after that, for when Mr. Crow makes up his mind not to talk Mr. Man himself couldn't drag a word out of him, and off I went hippety-hop as if it weren't in my head to go anywhere in particular; but I was headed for the pond, because I'd made up my mind to know what was to be done, and that before it happened, even if I had to hang around all night. It was well that I felt so determined, else I'd have missed the biggest part of the fun, and don't you think that we didn't have lots of it before dark!

"It didn't take me many minutes to go to the pond, for I skipped along at my best speed after I was so far away that Mr. Crow couldn't see me, and there I found old Slowly lying out on the sand as if he were in the last stages of consumption.

"'What's the matter, Mr. Turtle?' I asked, for even though I don't like the old fellow any too well it pays to be polite, and really, just for a minute, I was afraid he'd make up his mind to die.

"'I've got a terrible toothache, Mr. Rabbit!' he said, stretching his neck out of the shell till it looked like a snake, and when he'd got as far as that I couldn't help laughing right in his face, for anybody who ever heard Mr. Turtle knows that he hasn't got a tooth in his jaws and never had.

"'I'm in a bad way, Mr. Rabbit,' he went on, making as if he didn't see me laughing, 'and I don't know what'll happen if I can't get better mighty soon.'

"'Is there anything I can do to help you?' I asked, though I knew there wasn't, for how can you cure the toothache for a fellow who never had any teeth?

"'I don't reckon you can, Mr. Rabbit; there's only one person in all the big woods who could do me the least little mite of good,' he said with a groan that sounded as if a spring inside of him had broken and was whirling around to beat the band.

"'Who is it you want?' I asked, never so much as dreaming what kind of an answer he'd make, and he sobbed out as if he had already begun to die:

"'Jimmy Hedgehog is the only fellow who

could do me any good; but I'm afraid I'll draw my last breath before he comes around this way.'

"You could have knocked me down with a feather when he said that, for I knew it was some part of the plan Mr. Crow had hatched up, but I was more in the dark than ever and so would you have been. Of course I didn't let on that I knew the president of the club had been down that way and asked as innocent as any lamb:

"'How is it possible that Jimmy can help you, Mr. Turtle?'

"'I was eating a snail and must have got a piece of his shell in my teeth; if Jimmy would let me have one of his quills for a toothpick I might get it out.'

"Now what do you think of that? Talking about toothpicks when he didn't have even the shadow of a tooth to use them on! Well, I'm not the kind of rabbit to miss any fun and knowing Mr. Turtle wouldn't explain his plan to me however hard I might coax I said as if I believed all the hot air he'd been giving me:

"'If you think you must really see Jimmy I'll do what I can to find him.'

"'My dear Bunny, if you'd do that much for a poor fellow like me who can't get over the ground as you can I'd never forget the favor as long as I live. You are the one person in all the big woods who can get around quickly enough to save my life!'

"I didn't wait to talk with him any longer, for what would be the use when he was ready to tell me anything for the sake of shutting my eye, so off I went, putting in my best licks to be on hand when the fun began.

"Do you know, I had the job of my life finding Jimmy? It seemed as if he knew I was looking for him, and he was doing his best to keep out of my way. Luckily I happened to see Mr. Jay, and he told me he'd seen Jimmy under a lot of fir bushes over by the swamp, acting as if he'd been taken with a bad fit of the sulks, and sure enough I found him there, but he didn't look as if he were very glad to see me.

"'Howdy, Jimmy,' I said, soft as silk, when I'd gotten over making believe I was surprised to see him there. 'Anything gone wrong that you're tucked away here where even Professor Hawk would have hard work to find you?'

"'Now don't try to be funny!' he growled,

and just for the minute I was afraid we might have a row then and there because he was in such a bad temper. 'I'd like to know what business you've got running all over the country looking for me?'

"'But I haven't been running all over the country, Jimmy,' I said, speaking softly because I didn't want to have any trouble. 'Come to think of it, now that you've reminded me, I did want to find you on account of Slowly Turtle.'

"'I've had enough of you,' he snarled, bristling up his quills as if he counted on sticking some of them into me. 'After the way you went back on me in that scrape Bobby Coon got me into, I'm through with the whole Rabbit family, from this out. Just keep your eye on me, and you'll see that I'll even up that business before I'm many days older.'

"Of course I couldn't have him holding out against me like that, for I knew he might make lots of trouble if he tried very hard, and then again it didn't seem right to blame me for what I really couldn't help, so I talked as softly as I knew how, smoothing things over till he said, still acting grumpy :

"'Well, what do you want of me? I happen to know that you've been hunting high and low this past hour, and if that meddling Jay hadn't run across me by accident, you'd still be scurrying around as if I were the best friend you had in the world.'

"'That's just what I count you are, Jimmy,' and I nestled as near his nose as I could without filling myself full of quills. That seemed to quiet him down a little and I went on to explain about Mr. Turtle; telling Jimmy how sick the old fellow looked. I expected every minute that he'd give it to me hard for trying to stuff him with any such yarn as that old Slowly had the toothache, but, do you know, he never thought about Mr. Turtle's not having teeth, and asked, as if he'd got real interested in the story:

"'What does he think I can do? I'm no dentist's shop.'

"When I told him that Slowly believed the pain was caused by his getting a piece of snail's shell in his teeth, and that he could fix himself up all right if he had a hedgehog quill for a toothpick, that foolish Jimmy swallowed the story, shell and all.

"'I'm allowing that I'm the only one of the wood folks who really amounts to anything in the way of usefulness,' he said, grinning like a jack o' lantern, and shaking his quills till I had to get out in the open for fear some of them would strike me. 'If I can help old Mr. Turtle, of course I must do it; but you wait till the president of your blooming old club gets into trouble that nobody but me can pull him out of, and see how long it'll be before I so much as lift a paw! I wouldn't give that beggar Jim Crow one of my quills, not if he was starving to death!'

"I wanted to ask Jimmy how much good he thought one of his quills would do to a crow who was starving to death; but held my tongue, because I didn't want to stir him up while he was in such a good humor, and if I poked the least little bit of fun at him he might decide that he wouldn't go to Mr. Turtle, in which case I'd miss the fun I was counting on.

"Well, Jimmy strutted out from under the fir bushes, shaking himself to look big, and walking as if he thought he was the only thing in the big woods, while I hipperty-hopped at his side, but taking mighty good care not to get

so near that there was any danger of being scratched. You don't want to think that he was feeling any too friendly with me, even though we two were getting along so peaceably and every now and then he'd stop to threaten what he was going to do because I'd told the truth about the Bobby Coon business.

"I let him go on as wildly as he pleased, for I was thinking to myself all the time that Jimmy would soon be having a hard time if things went the way Mr. Crow and old Slowly had figured, and it was all I could do to keep myself from laughing right out loud, I felt so tickled. It seemed to me that Mr. Crow wouldn't hatch out a plan that could go wrong, and Mr. Turtle was so terribly in earnest about playing his part of it that I had good reason to think Jimmy would have the hot end of the stick before long, with me right on hand to see the whole game.

"Yes, I did tremble once in a while, when I thought of how hot Jimmy would be against me if he did get into a scrape, for by my hunting him up it looked a good deal as if I had quite a finger in the pie, whatever kind of pie it might be, though, as I've already said, I hadn't the

littlest bit of an idea as to what was really in the wind, but I knew it was about time for things to begin to hum, especially if Slowly kept on doing his part as well as he had begun."

CHAPTER XVI

TROUBLE IN THE CLUB

"It took Jimmy a long time to get down to the pond, because he had to stop every now and then to rub it into me on account of the Bobby Coon business, and by the way he talked you'd thought I was the only thing in the big woods who'd not done right," Mr. Bunny said as he nursed his knee carefully, swaying his body to and fro slowly, but keeping a sharp watch around lest some one of his many enemies should creep upon him unawares.

"If it had been at any other time, except when I counted he was going to get it good and hot mighty soon, I'd have had it out with him then and on the spot, for there isn't any hedgehog that ever walked who'll be allowed to give me cheap talk about what I hadn't any finger in, except to tag on behind when the two of 'em were going toward Mr. Man's barn, and I wouldn't have done even as much as that if I

hadn't known they'd call me 'fraid cat' unless I stayed with the crowd.

"Oh my! how big Jimmy did feel, and how he threw out his chest while we were going to the pond, and the more he talked the surer he was that there wasn't anything in the big woods that could so much as hold a candle to him! As I told you, I let him run on, because I had a mighty good idea of what was going to happen, and whenever we came to a big bunch of ferns I crept among them to have a chance for laughing without his seeing me, for if he'd caught a glimpse of the littlest kind of grin on my face he'd have suspected that something was up, when it would have been good-bye to Mr. Crow's plans.

"As luck would have it he never tumbled to a thing and when we got to the pond there was old Mr. Turtle lying out in the sun as if his very last day had come. He acted so sick that even though I knew he'd never had a tooth in his head I almost began to believe he really did have the toothache.

"'What's the matter, Mr. Turtle?' Jimmy asked, ruffling up his quills so's to make himself look as big as he felt, and old Slowly said,

speaking as if the breath had about gone out of his body :

"'I'm in a mighty bad way, Mr. Hedgehog, and I allow you're the only one in all the big woods who can give me a lift. I've never done anything wrong to you, and a young chap ought to be willing to help a poor old fellow who's got the misery in his tooth that I'm having.'

"'Of course, I'll do what I can, Mr. Turtle,' and Jimmy bristled around like a red and green auto that's gone wrong in its steering-gear. 'Suppose you show me the tooth and perhaps I can pull the thing out for you.'

"I thought for sure Jimmy had the old fellow then and that Mr. Crow's plan had failed, but old Slowly Turtle isn't half as foolish as he looks for he never turned a hair when he said :

"'It's no use for me to try to show it, Mr. Hedgehog, because I've had the pain so long that I've regularly got the lock-jaw. If you'd be willing to let me have one of your stoutest quills I'm most certain I could fix the thing up myself. You see, I've got the thick part of a snail's shell in my tooth and the minute that is out I'll be all right.'

"'You're welcome to a dozen quills, if that's

what you want; but you'll have to get Bunny to pull 'em out, for I can't do it,' and Jimmy looked around at me as if expecting I was going to thrust my paws among all those sharp-pointed toothpicks.

"'I don't believe I'd care to trust Bunny in such a job as that,' Mr. Turtle said, looking out of the corner of his eye at me as if to say that I was to keep my paws out of his pies, which I was perfectly willing to do. 'If you'd turn around, Mr. Hedgehog, so's I could see just which quill I wanted it wouldn't take me long to get what I needed.'

"Jimmy still believed that he must be the biggest kind of fellow among the wood folks if he was the only one who could save Mr. Turtle's life, and around he swung, his quills rustling like dry leaves in a strong wind. I caught just one glimpse of old Slowly's eye as he winked it wickedly, and then I saw his jaws come together on the middle of Jimmy's tail, where there wasn't a chance of his being pricked. Now don't you think there was any need of telling Jimmy that things had gone wrong in the rear! It was just the same as if old Slowly had telegraphed, for at the very minute Mr. Turtle got

the hold he wanted, that hedgehog let out a yell which you could have heard from one end of the big woods to the other, and off he started at full speed.

Mr. Turtle never said a word, and he couldn't on account of his mouth being so full. He didn't have time to wink at me again before I saw him whisking through the bushes just as if he were flying. It was as much as a minute before I came to understand what was happening, and then you can make up your mind that I put in my best licks to be on hand when the end came, for Jimmy isn't great at running, and it stood to reason he couldn't keep up that pace very long.

"I don't allow that the frightened hedgehog knew where he was aiming for when he started. You see old Slowly must have hurt him a good bit, if he shut his jaws together right hard, as Jimmy said he did, for Mr. Crow declares that he could bite off the end of an oak stick and not strain himself very much. It so happened, though, that when Jimmy struck his two-minute clip he was heading straight for the big oak, and nothing could have suited the president of the club any better.

"It wasn't very hard for me to get well up with the procession before the race was more than half run, and as we came within sight of the big oak I saw that nearly every member of the club was there, as if notices of a special meeting had been sent out. I afterward heard that all Cheeko's boys had been running around the country a full hour to get the wood folks gathered where they could see the fun, and surely those young fellows had done their work well, for it didn't seem as if any one was absent, though I'm allowing that more than one wished, before the day was over, that he hadn't been so prompt in answering the president's invitation.

"As near as I could figure it out, Jimmy didn't have an idea that any one was near until he found himself in the very midst of the crowd, and then he swung around in order to stop quickly, when, of course, old Mr. Turtle flew out like a rock on the end of a string, without any idea of where he'd bring up. Cocky Robin and Mr. Jay were roosting quite near the ground, where they could keep an eye out for foolish worms which might happen that way, and Mr. Turtle swept them off the branch like ninepins, knocking the two senseless.

"Mr. Jay let out a screech as he fell, and Jimmy, who couldn't seem to understand how hard he was swinging old Slowly, turned the other way like a flash, Mr. Turtle hitting Bobby Coon's mother such a clip on the head that I thought for certain she was dead. Then Mr. Crow hopped down to tell Slowly to let up, when Jimmy turned again, and over the old fellow went like the down of a thistle.

"I really haven't the time to tell you all that happened before old Slowly could be made to understand that he had carried out his part of the plot and a little more. Jimmy had regularly lost his head, what with the pain caused by Mr. Turtle's jaws, together with the uproar that began when he first appeared, and kept swinging around and around like a windmill that has suddenly gone crazy, with old Slowly flying out at the end of his tail knocking down everything and everybody in his way.

"It seemed as if Mr. Turtle must have been splintered into little bits, for whatever he struck was hit hard; but yet he really seemed to enjoy it, and when the rumpus was over the old fellow acted as if he were quite disappointed at having the circus over so soon.

"If you'll believe me, fully seven out of every ten of the club members had been knocked over from one to three times before we got any sense into Jimmy's wild head, and those who hadn't already come to harm were roosting mighty high, as if afraid that Slowly might lose his grip and come sailing up among the branches, as he would have done if any part of Jimmy's tail had come off suddenly. It didn't seem to me as if I had any call to mix up in the show, even though the president kept singing out for me to jump in and catch the crazy hedgehog, for when you find me mixing myself up with a lot of quills that are moving around as Jimmy's were then you'll catch Butcher Weasel asleep.

"There's no telling how long the performance would have lasted if Senator Bear, who had been awakened by the uproar, hadn't come up just when he did, and he got there in time to have old Slowly strike him fairly on the side; but it takes quite a blow to knock the Senator out, and Jimmy didn't have time enough to swing around again before Mr. Bear put one of his big paws on him.

"That held the crazy hedgehog down for a minute, and President Crow yelled savagely:

"'Let go his tail, you foolish old turtle! Do you count on killing the whole club?'

"'I'm only doing what you asked me to do,' Slowly grumbled as he let go his grip, and the minute his mouth was opened you can set it down as a fact that Jimmy took mighty good care to get his tail in out of harm's way.

"Now, as I've told you before, more than half the club members had been knocked around by Slowly and Jimmy, and the minute they heard that the job had been put up by Mr. Crow they sailed into him, calling the old fellow more names than there are days in the month. Jimmy lay there under the Senator's paw, but never said a word; he'd lost his breath after scrambling around so fast, which was one reason why he had nothing to say, and I reckon he was so frightened that he didn't dare to move his tongue for fear something worse would happen.

"Well, say, I've heard rows before, but never anything that came up to what we had right there under the big oak. The members who had been bruised couldn't find hard words enough to sling at the president, and those who came off without a scratch were cross because

they'd been obliged to move around so vigorously in order to keep out of Mr. Turtle's way.

"Mr. Crow stood the abuse for quite a while without making any back talk, and then he lost his temper, as even the blindest rabbit that ever lived could have seen, for he hopped around first on one foot and then on the other, acting as if he were choking because he couldn't get the words out fast enough.

"'I'm through with every one of you!' he croaked, ruffling up the feathers on his neck, and flapping his wings. 'You'll never catch me being president again of such a club of dummies as this, not if I live to be a thousand years old!'

"'You won't get the chance in this section of the country even if you should live two thousand years!' cried Mr. Jay, fairly boiling over with wrath because one of his eyes had been blackened, and the greater portion of his tail torn away.

"It's no use for me to try to tell you all that was said while every one was so worked up over what I had counted was going to be the joke of the season. If there were any harsh names which they didn't call Mr. Crow, it was because

they were forgotten in the excitement, and the scolding might have been kept up to this very day if the Professor, hearing the noise, hadn't come snooping around to see what he could pick up in the way of table dainties.

"Yes, that was the end of the Fur and Feather Club. Mr. Crow wouldn't speak to a single soul of us for ever and ever so long; Jimmy and his folks were so angry at us all that they moved away down to the lower end of the swamp, while old Mr. Turtle took it into his foolish head that he hadn't been treated right, and threatened to make it hot for the first member of the club who dared come near the pond, which he claimed was his private property. There was a warm old time in the big woods during the rest of that season, and Mrs. Bunny says it was the most fortunate thing that ever happened in our section, because we members had been regularly idling our time away under pretense of transacting club business, but of course you and I know that she puts it altogether too strongly.

"Look! Look over in the ferns!" and Mr. Bunny pointed excitedly with one paw. "There's Mrs. Bunny herself! I reckon she

thinks you may be here with the idea of starting another club, and she has come after me. She's got Sonny Bunny by the paw, which is the same as saying if I don't do as she wants she'll take him and go to her mother's, so I guess, in order to keep peace in the family, I'd better say good-bye."

Then Mr. Bunny Rabbit hipperty-hopped away to where his family awaited him, and there could be no question but that the long story had come to

THE END

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